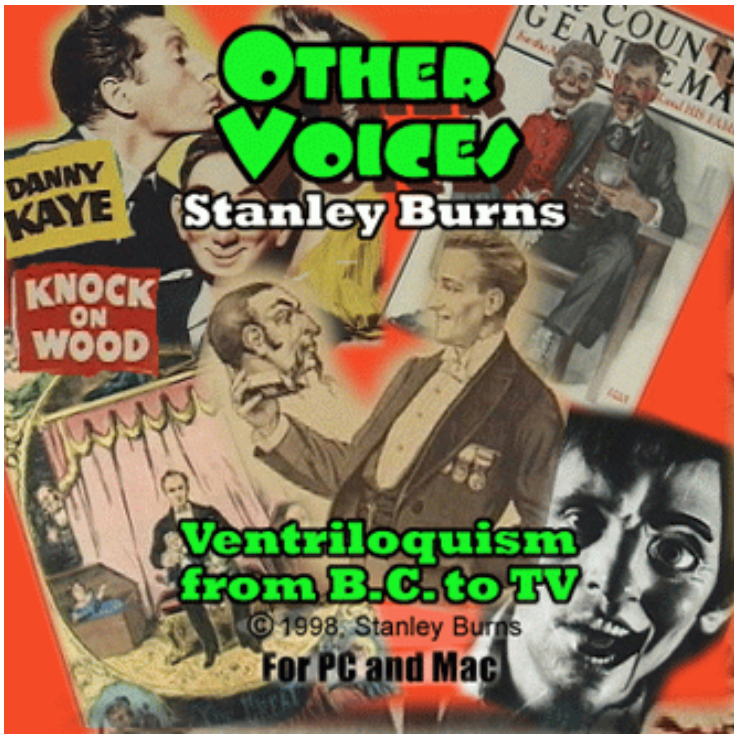
Click on the good Doctor for a personal greeting.

“Hello, My name Dr. Lichi. Welcome to
Other Voices -
Ventriloquism from B.C. To TV.”



Other Voices

While this CD uses some hypertext,
it is an evolving story,
with later references to prior material.
Therefore, it is linear and for a first read,
starting from Chapter I and going
in sequence to the end is highly recommended
to see the surprising revelations unfold, and
to make it easier to follow the developing story.
Though there are some short videos of the collection
and nearly 200 B&W and color pictures, some rare,
there are few bells and whistles,
but you will surely find the story fascinating.
We wish we could include everything there
ever was on ventriloquism, but we are limited to what
we had, what we could use, and space available.
That someone or something is not included is no
reflection on their value to our art or its story.
Most of the illustrations are “as is.” A handful have
been electronically cleaned up to enhance viewing.

We suggest you read
A Quick, Timesaving How-to
section below

Editor and Supplementary Research
Dan Ritchard

Graphic & Technical Consultant
Arthur Penman

Cover Design: Ed Lipinski

Acknowledgments

Poet John Donne said that no man is an island.
While I am not usually flowery or particularly,
sentimental, this is the culmination of much work
over many years and requires some special appreciation.
I gratefully acknowledge all the people who supported me
throughout the many phases of this labor of love.
Without them, one and all, this would not have been possible.
I must also give extra thanks to those who did more than most,
and if I have left anyone out, I apologize for the oversight.

First of all, my wife, Sylvia,
who did more than just put up with
all of what it takes to do a project such as this,
like having books and papers everywhere for years.
She has always helped me with my collection,
my correspondence, my phone calls
and was ever the gracious hostess.
She typed, read, reread and proofread ad infinitum,
and was always there for me through thick and thin
above and beyond everything required by the marriage vows.
That is true love.

I also wish to express my gratitude for the invaluable editing,
perpetual optimism, enduring encouragement
and assiduous assistance of Dan Ritchard,
that actually made this a reality.

Thank you to all my friends and associates,
many of whom I have met through this wonderful field of ventriloquism,
who have ferreted information, pictures, collectibles
or asked questions, offered suggestions, or in some way,
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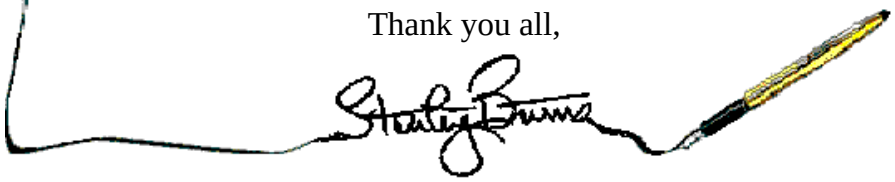

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A Quick, Timesaving How-to

PLEASE READ THIS

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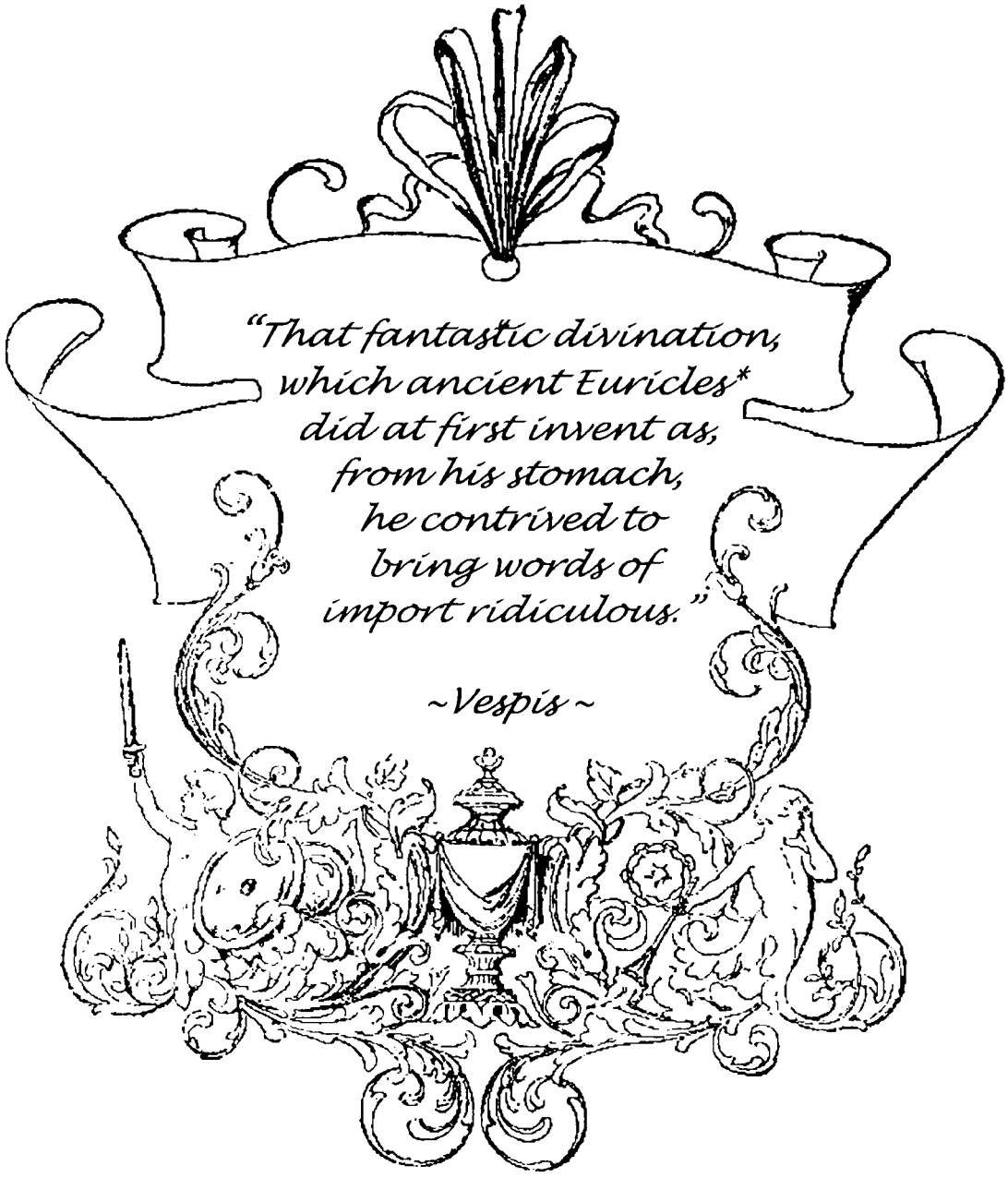
and type in the word you are looking for.

The Secret Behind it All

This major work that you are looking at has been a labor of love which has occupied me for many many years. Combining all the material I had personally collected and the research required to put the pieces of the puzzle together was a daunting task. At first it was going to be a book. It got a bit large and also evolved into something for which this medium would be more appropriate, but a book version has not been abandoned. This medium, however, let's us look at some short, exclusive clips of the first film ever made of Vent Haven with my friend W. S Berger showing off his prized collection to the author. Yet, even though it was moved to this high tech method of presentation, the subject, at its basic skill level is, in reality, a very low tech art. Low tech, perhaps, but certainly filled with wonders, blunders, mysteries, stories, treasures, pleasures, secrets, anecdotes, quotes, creativity, sensitivity, camaraderie, fun and laughs.

Even when it is not directly in the eye of the public at large, it is still a busy, active field. With new information coming to light about the past, and news and events and all manner of things happening all the time, even as you are reading about it, this first of its kind, unique disk *Other Voices — Ventriloquism from B.C. to TV* can never be complete. For example, The World Wide Web has information on ventriloquism and it is always in a state of flux. For that reason, there are no references or active links to it included here, because all too often we find they have become disappointing dead ends. There is so much to this art that any one of these pages alone could probably serve as the basis of a doctoral thesis. But that would probably be more than you would care to know, which is why it is distilled here right down to the gist and the jest of the matter. So, you are now in the front row of the theater of ventriloquism. Travel with me, back in time and around the globe — to tour the surprising, wacky, weird, wonderful world of ventriloquism.



*Euricles, the first entertaining ventriloquist, who discovered how to use the art as a performer. Not knowing what to call it, his followers referred to it as "Euricles' invention."

Speaking for Myself

There are many people around my age afflicted with "generation envy," a condition whereby they lament either, "I was born too late," or "I was born too soon." Some look back wistfully at simpler, slower, times, while others wish they had grown up with all the modern advantages available today. I have enjoyed both. I feel that I was born at exactly the right time. Given a choice, this is the perfect era for me. I consider myself and my generation fortunate to have been exposed to the golden days of vaudeville, glamorous nightclubs, and the beginning of television.

We witnessed the extraordinarily talented variety artists who left lasting impressions on everyone, especially me. Unfortunately for today's generation, there are hardly any remnants of those wonderful acts, so how could they know what they missed. Yet, those performances live on in the memories and hearts of delighted audiences all over America and the world. As a ventriloquist, it is my honor to be a lifelong member of this theatrical community. I am equally delighted to bring them to the attention of those who, in my opinion, were not fortunate enough to be around to enjoy them at the time.

I can hardly remember a period in my life when I was not completely enchanted by my favorite performance art. My earliest recollections of ventriloquism begin at the age of seven. My immigrant European parents believed that in America children should gain some form of culture through the arts, so they arranged for violin lessons. It didn't matter whether or not their child had any musical talent, Pop insisted that *his* son should learn to play an instrument.

My violin instructor was a unique man named Mr. Fiedleholtz. (Honestly, that was his real name!) He played in the orchestra of Loew's Delancey, a popular movie and vaudeville theater on New York's Lower East Side. After my Saturday morning lesson, Mr. Fiedleholtz had to report to the theater for the matinee performance. As a treat he took me with him. We entered through the stage door and walked into the auditorium from the orchestra pit, a privilege worth bragging about to my friends. Also, getting in for free was a status symbol.

Gabriel Fiedleholtz placed me in a seat in the theater with instructions to stay there until he came back. While normally a seven-year-old child would have rebelled or become restless, the shows on the stage were so hypnotizing and so dazzling that he had to pry me loose! The entire week was spent replaying everything I had seen, every move, line, joke and gesture, while anxiously awaiting the next visit. The wide variety of artists, singers, song and dance teams, magicians, acrobats, and animal acts enthraled me. But the ones I loved the most were the ventriloquists. It marked the beginning of my overpowering interest in ventriloquism. Though impossible to know

it at the time, this would be my destiny. Whether or not my violin playing improved has been long forgotten, but every single act of the major stars that seven-year-old first saw there remains crystal clear. Unknown to today's audiences, they were headliners at that time. The most famous husband and wife team were Vox and Walters, whose act featured the cries of a baby. It was so realistic it was hard to believe an adult was creating the illusion. Frank Gaby appeared with a beautiful woman and an ugly dummy, and was heckled from the audience by an outrageous stooge. I recall another performer who sent shock waves through me with his surprising finale — his odd-looking dummy jumped right off his knee and ran offstage! Marshall Montgomery stuffed a handkerchief into his own mouth while his wooden partner whistled a song! I will recount more, in later chapters, about these amazing performers who so intrigued and fascinated me. At the time, I did not dream that most of these great artists or their offspring would someday become my peers, mentors, and even my friends, or that I would ever get to meet the President of the United States.

From that introduction to the art, everything seemed to point me toward a lifetime career in ventriloquy. My first book on the subject, and therefore my favorite, was *Ventriloquism; contains such a full, clear and concise explanation of the subject that any one can readily master and practice the art*, by Charles Henry Olin. After reading that, I was launched.

As young sports fans have an urge to gather baseball, football, and basketball trading cards of their favorite players, my urge was to collect ventriloquial paraphernalia. I began saving everything and anything even remotely related to the art. Over the years it has added up to many hundreds of items: colorful rare posters, photographs, playbills, books, souvenirs, and novelty items.

Though I was mesmerized by watching ventriloquists, a personal problem further propelled me toward this fascinating field. At the age of eight, I was afflicted with an embarrassing stutter. There were times when it seemed that spoken words would never come out. Being the victim of taunting classmates in elementary school, and the object of pity from various teachers, was no fun. One teacher suggested visiting the Heckscher Foundation, a community center for underprivileged children in East Harlem, on Fifth Avenue at 104th Street. This organization offered programs in arts and crafts, and other after-school activities, which would be a blessing later. At this time, though, some of the instructors tried to help cure my speech impediment with elocution lessons, but unfortunately, we made little progress, the problem persisted and I felt like more of a failure. [That building is still there, with its name in stone, but it became El Museo Del Barrio, in the mid 1980s.]

Thus harassed, school was torture for me. To avoid the taunts and the teasing, truancy became my religion. I became a devout hooky player. To escape my jeering schoolmates there seemed to be only one way out for me — the appealing distractions of the wonderful Harlem Dime Museum at 125th Street and Lexington Avenue, in New York City. This poor man's Disneyland was actually a penny arcade, complete

with peep shows, automated gypsy fortune tellers and such. To me, however, the big attraction was the sideshow in the rear of the establishment. It featured such circus freaks as Albert Albertus, half man-half woman, a bearded lady; and Ajax the sword swallower, who had a long sword blade going down into his stomach, and attached to the hilt of the sword was the butt of a rifle aiming straight up. When he pulled the trigger and fired the rifle — he absorbed the recoil on the sword in his throat and stomach. There were many more oddities, but the most fascinating to me, the ones that gave me utter joy, were the occasional magicians and ventriloquists.

Hanging around the Harlem Museum, with its extremely comfortable atmosphere, was exciting for me. Perhaps because the inhabitants of the Museum were a collection of oddballs to whom most eccentricities were the norm, no one ever commented upon, nor seemed to notice, my stutter. They all befriended me, making me feel at ease. These people were so fascinating and, in time, this way of life became an addiction for me.

I ran errands for the entertainers and occasionally became a "shill." A shill is an accomplice posing as a customer to encourage the purchase of anything sold. Of course, between shows I returned all the items. Had I kept all the things I supposedly bought I'd have needed a warehouse to store them. The performers treated me as their mascot and gave me entree at any time to see the shows as their guest.

One of the most interesting artists I met was Noel Lester, a versatile magician who embellished his act with ventriloquism and wire walking. He did one unusual ventriloquial scene which I watched over and over. He performed it on a slack wire upon which he had balanced a table and chair. While precariously perched there, he executed magic tricks with one hand while he manipulated his dummy with the other hand. The dummy said, "I'm thirsty, I want a drink!" Noel Lester picked up a pitcher and poured clear water into several glasses. In one glass it turned to wine, in another beer, and in still another, milk! He offered the glass of milk to the dummy, saying, "Drink this, it will give you blood." The dummy yelled back, "Hell no, I'm not bloodthirsty." It was an hysterical joke back then.

One day, when I brought coffee to Noel in his dressing area, he noticed me staring in awe at the dummy. He was nice enough to show me how its mouth opened and closed, and where the performer's hands and fingers were placed. Then he handed the dummy to me and said, "Here, you try it." Needing no further encouragement, I took the dummy, placed my hands in the right positions and knew at once that they had always belonged there. It was heavenly. The "two of us" proceeded to delight Lester by doing my primitive version of his act, which I had seen him do over and over. Lester was kind and encouraging. "That's good kid, go on, do some more." Regrettably, I couldn't — my whole repertoire was his whole repertoire. Noel kept insisting. Finally, I remembered a book I'd been reading, some routines of which I could recall. Fortunately, a joke that every ventriloquist of that period used came to mind, and I figured I could use it too. My lip control was less than perfect and my manipulation was bad, but my newfound enthusiasm threw

caution to the wind. It turned out to be a momentous turning point. I focused on the performance. Trying to say the words and move the mouth, while not moving mine, made me nervous and, as I gripped the dummy with a shaky hand I asked,

"Toney, what's the shape of the world?"
Toney: "I don't know."
Me: "What's the shape of my cuff links?"
Toney "Oh, they're square."
Me: "Not those. My good gold ones, the ones I wear on Sundays."
Toney: "They're round."
Me: "That's right. Now, what's the shape of the world?"
Toney: "Square on weekdays, and round on Sundays."

"That's great," Lester beamed. He called to the manager, "Hey, Eddie. Come here. I've got our next attraction." Mr. Eckerson, a tall, blondish man with a pleasant smile, came over. I felt good. I had just made my successful debut. I said to Toney, "Sing a song for the gentlemen. I'll give you a shiny new penny." My partner replied, "I'd rather have a dirty old nickel." Little did I know then, that one day I would appear there as a performer in my own right. Oh, it wasn't a high class place, for sure, yet you couldn't perform there unless you were very good.

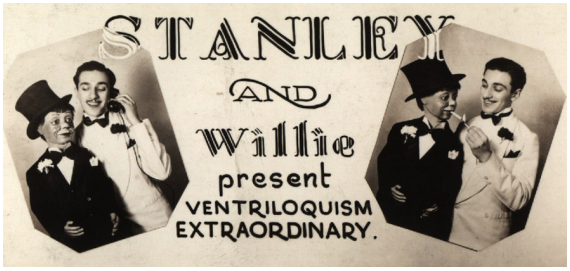
But something more important happened. It suddenly dawned on me that the dummy didn't stutter. Amazingly, when speaking through the dummy there wasn't a stutter in the woodpile. This was too good to be true. Trying it again and again produced the same wonderful results. This was such a shock at the time that there were no thoughts of how this miracle had happened. A psychologist or psychiatrist could have explained the phenomenon. At the time, I was too young, too excited, and much too delighted to care. Since then it became clear that being involved with something outside of myself, concentrating on making the dummy speak in a different voice, focusing on the movements, all removed the blocks to clear speech for me. This has often been the case with singers who stutter when speaking, but never when singing. My problem disappeared only when speaking for the dummy. With that start, there was hope. In time the "cure" became complete under all conditions.

Is this really the first photo of the author and his homemade dummy, ca. 1932? Dummies are Toney and Little Gabby. Note the telephone, drinking glass and magic table.

The thrill of bringing a dummy to life, or making voices seem to come from nowhere, but especially having people laugh *with* me, rather than *at* me, was great fun and a terrific ego booster. Best of all, it gave me a career. What a revelation! I confided my interest in ventriloquism to Charlie Winters, an arts and crafts instructor at the Heckscher Foundation. He gladly helped me make my first crude dummy out of *papier-mâché*. I named him Toney, after the figure that got me started.

Soon I was in business, and at the age of thirteen began entering talent contests, and winning. The standard “First Prize” was a dollar, but the impresarios running them always requested a fifty-cent kickback. It was a rude awakening. After saving enough of my cash prizes, it was time to buy a professional dummy. Al Flosso, a carnival magician known as the Coney Island Fakir, supplied the trade with equipment as a sideline and sold me a dummy on the lay-away plan. Eventually giving up my amateur status I became a “pro,” joining the ranks as a real “vent,” the shorthand, insider term for ventriloquist. By the way, I have been spelling out the word ventriloquist, or using other references, because I really do not like the term “vent,” but I do use it where appropriate.

In my case, as a kid with a stutter, when I discovered ventriloquism I went from diffident and despondent to confident and independent. What happened to me was a unique occurrence. Each individual and situation is special. No one would ever claim that ventriloquism could rid you of some social affliction, make you the life of the party, or get you your own personal dream girl or guy. But it will certainly add enjoyment and color to your existence and help you make friends wherever you might perform. I know that it did help turn a shy, introverted street kid into a professional entertainer whose work has enabled him to travel all over the world and meet exciting and prominent celebrities. During Franklin Roosevelt’s presidency I had the privilege of appearing at the “little White House,” in Hyde Park, New York, with several other performers including comedian/actor Zero Mostel and Bill Williston, a fine magician. The performance that night was well received. At the conclusion of the show we were served snacks by Eleanor Roosevelt. We would have been happy to leave then, but, since there were no trains running that late, we were invited to spend the night and I had the honor of sleeping in the bedroom the President had lived in as a youngster. We were surprised the following morning to find that Mrs. Roosevelt was joining us at breakfast. This unpretentious, hospitable lady was genuinely appreciative of our performances.



One early postcard hand-lettered by the author.

Wherever my travels take me, there seems to be sincere interest in ventriloquism. Audiences of all ages are curious about it. People have constantly posed questions, not only about how it is done, but about the background of the subject. Early on, some questions would occasionally draw a blank, and that encouraged me to investigate. I found it all fascinating and continued to search out information. I found bits and pieces of the puzzle here and there. It soon became apparent that there were few contemporary, and no comprehensive books on the subject. The ones that did exist were dated, and limited in the amount and extent of information they offered. In the past, most of the books came from Europe, especially England, with limited revelations and mini-biographies. Some were misleading, perhaps because of

ignorance or a reluctance to tell the truth. Significantly, it became clear that ventriloquism has been minimized in importance, treated as a minor entertainment art form and misrepresented in the movies and on television. There were odd, negative or inaccurate reports circulating, as well. Many years ago, when I first started arranging material from my sizable collection to start writing chapters for this unprecedented project, I found there was not one book that accurately reflected the complete spectrum of the fascinating world of ventriloquism. Since then some have appeared on the scene, and that is good for the art. However, there were errors and some aspects that still remained unaddressed.

I also felt that early American ventriloquism was not given its due. Moreover, it was important to me to continue my work on a broader account, so that I could properly cover areas of the art not fully dealt with before and to dispel many prevalent misconceptions. In a sense, this is but the latest effort on continuum of illuminating works, starting from the sixteenth century, that has informed and educated, not only fellow performers, but the public as well, regarding the vastness of ventriloquism. Thus, the added facts and supplementary research round out the story and help put the pieces of the puzzle together to see the big picture, and our art's place in it. I have also included some of my own personal experiences, amusing anecdotes, some peeks into the private lives of noted ventriloquists, and my impressions of the stars I have known. Since I knew or had seen many of their acts, I felt it would be nice to share those recollections to help bring the story to life. I wrote this book to try to set some records straight, show the myriad aspects of the art and its hard-won place in our society and popular culture. In the process, I would be sharing my lifelong love of ventriloquism, and even though putting it together has been such a demanding and time consuming task, I share the fun of it along the way, too. Since we will often be visiting America and England, both variations in spelling and punctuation will be included without "favoritism," or perhaps "favouritism", where appropriate.

Join me on a fascinating journey down through the ages, into a subject that is as broad as the history of humanity. Unlike the stereotype of the little boy figure on the knee, you will see there has always been a wide variety of acts. Depending upon the era and the area where they appear, acts can be squeaky clean for families, or offer off-color, broad comedy or sophisticated and unique approaches, using any number of figures from none, to one, to dozens.

Here then, long-hidden secrets on this far-reaching and widespread cryptic craft are revealed as it evolved from antique art to antic art — from B.C. to TV.

Chapter 1
From B.C...

For many centuries, in many lands, people have been amazed and amused, confounded and confused, fascinated and fooled, by sounds and voices emanating from the most improbable places. When an inanimate object appeared to speak, when a voice or sound was heard from out of thin air or from another unlikely source, it was really a sham, a scam; it was the auditory illusion of ventriloquism.

Today the art of ventriloquism is a delightful entertainment, bringing amusement and pleasure to adults and children alike. However, it was not always viewed as a performance art.

The vocal trickery of "throwing" sounds or voices which seem to "come from out of the blue," or having objects "speak" is an acoustical illusion, created by the skill and misdirection of the performer, coupled with the listener's imagination, a practice that can be traced back six millennia.

By sifting through its misty, mysterious past we have found that ventriloquism has had a subtle, though sometimes powerful influence on many cultures. In ancient times, illiterate, unsophisticated individuals were beguiled by the mystique surrounding the "performer" and the performance. Egyptian priests thus enhanced their standing. These mysterious, all-powerful personages seemed capable of conjuring up the dead and having them "speak." The effect was heightened when the conjuror/priest, bowing his head, spoke in an eery half-sibilant, half-suppressed tone, which was attributed to the dead.

Jesus and His Apostles admonished those who believed in the practitioners of the supernatural, condemning these latter of witchcraft and wizardry. On the other hand, the Greeks viewed ventriloquism as a form of amusement. Pythagoras, the noted mathematician and philosopher, had clearly mastered the art of having sounds appear to come from nowhere. Walking by a stream with his disciples, the prankster amused his friends by greeting the stream and then apparently having it return the salutation. The motives of practitioners of ventriloquism were quite varied, sometimes using the art for fun, sometimes for gain. How many have been taken in by this simple, but clever, con?

Chapter II
World's Oldest Con Game

"The art of deceiving is as old as the world itself. Everything alive that has in itself the faculty of determining its movement, brings with it, at its birth, the art of sham, an art that so marvelously contributes to the confusion of mankind."

This charmingly cynical revelation, by Mgr. [Johannes de] Abbè de la Chappelle, Censor-Royal of the French court, in 1772, in his book, *The Ventriloquist* or "The Engastromyth," set the tone for the first definitive accounting of the history and art of ventriloquism.

Chappelle's original exposé challenged the validity of many of the supposed facts of the past. It claimed that certain Biblical revelations and phenomena considered supernatural, such as the predictions of the Greek oracles, were actually the work of early ventriloquists.

The origins of ventriloquism have been lost in the dusty files of time, but it is safe to assume that this vocal art predates man, and has conceivably been in existence since some prehistoric beast, bird or insect first uttered a sound.

In the Rocky Mountain region there is a small, rabbit-like animal, the pika, which some experts consider to have "ventriloquial" abilities. When in danger, the pika can confuse his enemy by squeaking in such a way that the sounds appear to come from different areas. The similar species, Ochotona collaris, or "Collared Pika" is described by the Department of Renewable Resources: [Emphasis added]

> From amongst the boulders in the talus slope, a weak "meep" signals the presence of the pika. **But locating this little ventriloquist is a challenge**. Grey as the rocks in which it lives and about the size of a tennis ball, the collared pika is difficult to spot, especially when its call never seems to come from where the pika is located.
>
> [Talus: A sloping mass of rock debris at the base of a cliff.]

Wolves, too, have the capability of howling in different frequencies, which tends to confuse the listener as to the direction of the source. When you can't tell the direction, you can't be sure if you are hearing one or more, either taking turns or

communicating. Theodore Roosevelt wrote this observation in his 1885 book *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman*, subtitled *Sketches of Sport on the Northern Cattle Plains*.

> According to my experience, the wolf is rather solitary. A single one or a pair will be found by themselves, or possibly with one or more well-grown young ones, and will then hunt over a large tract where no other wolves will be found; and as they wander very far, and as their melancholy howlings have a most ventriloquial effect, they are often thought to be much more plentiful than they are.(Chapter I p. 28)

Here is another interesting aspect, but this time it is the rattlesnake's turn. While these dangerous denizens of the field and forest are known for their ability to confuse the ears, in the manner of a ventriloquist, is it sufficiently well known to be used in a book? Note that it is still unfamiliar enough to city folks that the author slips in the "every woodsman knows" explanation. It's not that the snake is a ventriloquist, the point is that it, and other animals, are recognized for their ability to fool the ear. Noted novelist Zora Neale Hurston, (Oprah Winfrey bought the movie rights to one of her books) has such a reference in *Sweat*, a 1920 short story about life in the south.

> The drawn shade shut out the dawn, shut in the night. But the thin walls held back no sound. "Dat ol' scratch is woke up now!" She mused at the tremendous whirr inside, which every woodsman knows, is one of the sound illusions. The rattler is a ventriloquist. His whirr sounds to the right, to the left, straight ahead, behind, close under foot — everywhere but where it is. Woe to him who guesses wrong unless he is prepared to hold up his end of the argument!

Other creatures endowed with a talent for making deceptive or imitative sounds are: the mocking bird, the American chickadee, the parrot, and the mynah bird. Birds are the best ventriloquists since they do not have lips that move; they sing from the upper end of their windpipe. They can appear to be near or far, while actually being within ten feet of the listener. The famous poet William Wordsworth had an ear for this. In his *Complete Poetical Works*, 1888, he wrote about it in this 1834 poem, with title and subtitle, "The Redbreast" Suggested in a Westmoreland Cottage. He describes the bird's ability in this way:

> He plays the expert ventriloquist;
> And, caught by glimpses now--now missed,
> Puzzles the listener with a doubt
> If the soft voice he throws about
> Comes from within doors or without!
> Was ever such a sweet confusion,
> Sustained by delicate illusion?
> He's at your elbow – to your feeling

The notes are from the floor or ceiling;
And there's a riddle to be guessed,
'Till you have marked his heaving chest...

Thus, humans are not the sole possessors of Nature's gift of aural camouflage. [See "Talk to the Animals"]

While we will never know who really "invented" ventriloquism we can guess that the first human ventriloquist who knew what he or she was doing was probably a cave dweller who accidentally learned that imitating the cry or sound of some familiar creature could entice prey into a trap or frighten a predator out of the neighborhood. Today's hunter using a duck call or other variety of vocal animal lure exploits the same principle.

The discovery of ventriloquism may have been accidental, but human intelligence gave it significance, purpose, and direction. Ventriloquism, as it is practiced today, is considered merely a form of entertainment to amuse and instruct. Therefore, it is difficult to believe that it was originally a calculated hoax perpetrated by scoundrels to frighten the gullible, surreptitiously influence the uninitiated and ultimately, to control the superstitious. Just as many average men and women today consult astrologers, numerologists, fortune-tellers and the like, to determine the course of their future, and seek spiritual, romantic or financial guidance, the typical Greek in 300 B.C. made few decisions without first consulting an oracle. They acted as intermediaries to Apollo and other pagan gods. In time, religious historians and Biblical students exposed these individuals as larcenous priests and sorceresses who, by using ventriloquism, or a modification of it, grew rich from offerings and fees paid them by the unsophisticated citizenry they duped.

Since they only had candles and torches in those days, consulting an oracle was conducted in a dim, poorly ventilated temple which was the site of the ceremony. An air of theatricality added to the air inside, which was permeated with the fumes of smoldering candles, incense and burning leaves, some of which may have been marijuana or a similar plant. This had an intoxicating effect which left the audience in a trance-like state, ready to accept almost anything it heard. There were variations on the ritual, depending on time and place. Some used a tripod stool that the priestess sat upon over a crevice that emitted fumes, others used statues as the focal point.

For example, while facing a statue of Apollo, a Sybil or sorceress performed the rituals, with her back to the assembled worshipers, thus her lips were effectively hidden. A supplicant then asked the Sybil a question which she ceremoniously relayed to the statue of the god. The reply from the statue came in an eerie, unearthly tone. The answers were always in the form of rhymed verses or riddles which were ambiguous, so that the questioner could interpret them in almost any way they desired. No one dared challenge the deity's responses which were, after all, the words of the god. As Mary Wollstonecraft wrote in her classic *Vindication of The Rights of Woman*, which is still read today in classes on feminism;

> ...The oracles of old were thus delivered by priests dedicated to the service of the God who was supposed to inspire them. The glare of worldly pomp which surrounded these impostors, and the respect paid to them by artful politicians, who knew how to avail themselves of this useful engine to bend the necks of the strong under the dominion of the cunning, spread a sacred mysterious veil of sanctity over their lies and abominations. Impressed by such solemn devotional parade, a Greek, or Roman lady might be excused, if she inquired of the oracle, when she was anxious to pry into futurity, or inquire about some dubious event: and her inquiries, however contrary to reason, could not be reckoned impious.- But, can the professors of Christianity ward off that imputation? Can a Christian suppose that the favourites of the most High, the highly favoured, would be obliged to lurk in disguise, and practise the most dishonest tricks to cheat silly women out of the money - which the poor cry for in vain?...

Perhaps the name is familiar. Perhaps not. She wrote many stories, and married William Godwin, but it was their daughter, Mary Godwin, who became well known for her writings after she married writer/poet Percy Shelley in 1816. It was as Mary Shelly she became best known for her gothic novel, *Frankenstein: or, the Modern Prometheus,* published in 1818. Note the double title, so common at the time. Long before that, Jewish folklore spoke of the "Golem," an artificially created human being supernaturally endowed with life, but this was the first "monster" book, and would go on to stimulate many more "firsts." There are similarities between these and spirit worship, idols, and ventriloquism, which revolve around imparting "life" and "speech" to inanimate figures, and later in movies with the theme of, mostly malevolent, dummies and dolls coming to life, wrought, so to speak, from dust.

Mary Wollstonecraft was another voice of reason looking back at divination as a hoax and seers as merely ventriloquists. She exposed the art more as artifice and less than a gift of the gods, unless you were the "holy ones" who used the divine device, rather than the innocent dupes who were their targets. Following the basic principle of successful selling, "find a need and fill it," enterprising practitioners such as *shamans*, pagan priests, thieves, and charlatans and con artists of all sorts benefitted from these counterfeit utterances, while medicine men enhanced their prowess and sought aid from the spirits of, for example, wolves and bears, which will be covered in the chapter on "Gospel Ventriloquism," for those aspects. With this "gift" the so called "supernatural voices" were also bestowed on such inanimate objects as trees, rocks, the elements, and even the earth itself. Ventriloquism was a marvelous persuader. It could be heard but not seen. Based purely on sound, it left no tangible evidence for incrimination. You would have to be caught in the act, and the elaborate preparations helped to prevent that. [However tempting, there is no proof yet that "sham" is derived from "*shaman*," but the Oxford English Dictionary, Second Edition [OED] cites this interesting variation of the spelling, and its use in

1868. “F. Whymper *Trav. Alaska* p. 255 The Schaman, pronounced exactly like our word showman.”]

Archeologists have traced ventriloquism as far back as early Hebrew and Egyptian civilizations. It has been established that, at one time, the guards of the Pyramids used their voice-throwing talents to frighten and intimidate approaching thieves. Knowing this, we are faced with an intriguing puzzle. It concerns a particular carved animal in the Egyptian collection at the Louvre Museum in Paris, France, which is especially interesting to us. This sculpture is in the image of the Egyptian god, “Anubis.” A jackal-headed Egyptian god and the son of Osiris, He conducted the dead to judgment in the nether world. Like many carvings of jackals, it was made in the twentieth dynasty, around 1080 B.C. What is so curious is that this particular one has a moving mouth! If the Egyptian priests who had a knowledge of ventriloquism exercised it in their task of warding off robbers and invaders of tombs, then it would be the earliest example of a ventriloquial figure with a moving mouth. Unfortunately, no documentation of its use, or a statue like it, has so far been found.

The first written reference to ventriloquism that has come down to us may be found in the Bible, Isaiah 29:14:

> And who shall be brought down and shall speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be out of the dust, and thy voice shall be, as one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust.

In Isaiah 5:1 9; allusion is also made to “...wizards that peep and mutter.” Also the following reference in Deuteronomy 18:11 “...or a charmer, or one that consulteth a ghost or a familiar spirit, or a necromancer...”

While the Bible doesn’t actually use the word “ventriloquism,” it does describe what the ventriloquial “voices” sounded like. It refers to a necromancer as an *ob* who speaks with the dead. Dr. J H Hertz, chief Rabbi of Great Britain (1872-1946), a respected authority on the Old Testament, determined that it was all a scam and shed light on the subject when he wrote, “From Isaiah VIII,19 it would seem that the *ob* was a kind of ventriloquist who impersonated the dead by speaking in a faint voice from the ground.”[1]

The Bible banned such necromancers, “For whoever doeth these things is an abomination unto the LORD; and because of these abominations the LORD thy GOD is driving them out from before thee.” Deuteronomy 18:11.

Even though sorcerers and witches were banned, belief in the power of a “second voice” or “familiar spirit” remained strong. There is evidence that the practice of spiritualism, by which the spirit (so characterized) of someone who has passed on, is called upon to foretell the future. Moses was so concerned about this practice that he formulated what are called the Mosaic laws which forbade the Israelites from consulting those claiming to have “familiar spirits.”

Sometimes despairing situations cause men to resort to desperate solutions. The Bible reports that Saul, King of the Israelites, ignored the Mosaic laws and "said unto his servants, 'Seek me a woman that divineth a ghost.'" The services of a seer, the infamous Witch of Endor, were called upon. If she would conjure up the spirit of the dead King Samuel, to predict his future in the fateful battle of Gilboa, Saul would grant her immunity from the Mosaic prohibition. (Samuel XXVIII, 19)

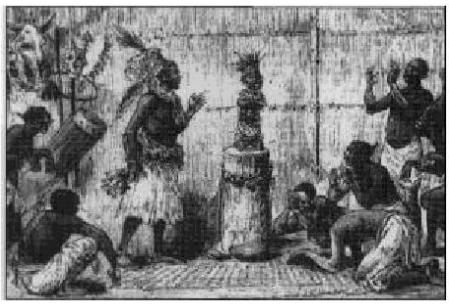
Using what has long been believed to be ventriloquism by some authorities, and even later ventriloquists, the infamous "con woman" conducted an improvised *séance* and convinced Saul that he was speaking to the spirit of the departed Samuel. Saul fought the battle of Gilboa in which he was defeated. Wounded and disgraced, Saul fell with his sons. Saul lived at a time when there was little doubt about the power of witches, but by the late 1300s, Chaucer, considered to be the greatest writer of medieval England, indicates in *The Friar's Tale* that there was some doubt:

> ...The fiend replied thus:
> "Nay. Sometimes we feign them, sometimes we arise
> In bodies that are dead, in sundry wise,
> And speak as reasonably and fair and well
> As to the witch at En-dor Samuel.
> And yet some men maintain it was not he;
> I do not care for your theology...

There are religious people today who do not accept ventriloquism as harmless fun. They adhere to the strictly religious viewpoint, denouncing it as the work of the devil or other evil spirit, and interpret the Bible literally.

Perhaps because ventriloquism, in its many forms, continued to flourish in subsequent centuries around the world, as the tool of numerous advocates of the occult, the stigma lingers. The drama of disembodied voices convinced superstitious followers, as well as those who followed a different religious path, that the spiritual leader was, indeed, in contact with unearthly beings. Ventriloquism endured as an ideal way of defrauding and dominating ingenuous believers.

A perfect example of this was reported in the *Boy's Own Paper*, a nineteenth century British publication. It described a ventriloquial swindle in Ashantee, on the west coast of Africa, in 1896. According to the story, a member of a warrior tribe had died under strange circumstances and a primitive grand jury was assembled to solve the mystery. Because the man had neither perished in battle, nor while hunting, and there were no witnesses, the members had gathered in their huge council hut to determine the cause of death and possibly identify the killer. In the hut's center was a large roughly hewn



The idol holds court, center stage.

wooden idol decorated with appropriate mystical ornaments. It represented the natives' most sacred deity and it would serve as an earthly body through which the departed spirit could speak.

The fetish man, adorned with feathers and beads, his body painted with mystical symbols, stood beside the idol. As the tribesmen sat around him in a circle, he excited them with religious incantations. When he felt he had raised emotions to fever pitch, he dramatically turned to the figure. The natives sat in awestruck silence as he began to question it. He first inquired if the dead man was satisfied with the manner in which his funeral had been conducted. When the carved figure seemingly replied in the affirmative, the tribe was amazed. In response to other trivial queries, further answers of approval seemed to come from the wooden lips of the sacred idol in breathy, eerie tones. The performance slowly built up to its denouement. The fetish man demanded that the spirit name his murderer! The silence in the hut rivaled that of a tomb. There was no response. To aid the spirit, names of tribesmen in the audience were suggested by the holy one. Still, there was no response. The tension mounted as the roll call continued and the roster of names dwindled. Finally, the interrogator spoke the name of the man who, coincidentally, had refused to pay the holy man his tithe, (the customary bribe for sacred services) and the wooden idol uttered a devastating, accusing, "Yes!" The tribesmen, naively believed that the spirit of the departed, speaking through the idol, had truthfully identified his murderer. They tortured and killed the innocent victim of the fetish man's spiteful revenge.

The use of the art for vocal villainy, however was not limited to demonology. Not all scams ended in death either; some were just for personal gain. The first ventriloquial 'con man' on record was Louis Brabant, a valet to the sixteenth-century French monarch, King Francis I. Today, Brabant might be classified as a "medium," specializing in the reproduction of the voices, moans and groans of the dead. He fell in love with a beautiful young heiress whose father rejected him as a suitor. Upon the father's death, Brabant approached the widow and performed an impressive vocal trick. He convinced the bereaved woman that she was hearing her late husband instruct her to give their daughter in marriage to "...this worthy man named Louis Brabant." The poor woman, unaware of Brabant's talents, listened in awe believing that her late husband was speaking to her from 'the beyond,' and obeyed.

Then, to finance his marriage he sought and found a new victim. He found a banker named Cornu, in the town of Lyons, whom, he had been informed, was a usurer, and extremely wealthy. He had further ascertained that Cornu was an exceptionally devout churchgoer, so he reasoned that the banker felt guilty about his misdeeds and tried to ease his conscience with good works. Brabant visited Cornu and turned the conversation to religious matters, speaking of demons, torments in purgatory and hell, and the inevitability of punishment for evil deeds. Playing on Cornu's rising emotions, Brabant lapsed into silence. Suddenly, from out of the air, a disembodied voice identified itself as belonging to the banker's departed father. He complained that his soul had been suffering from torments of the damned because of

his son's illegal business practices. He further warned him that he, too, would suffer a similar eternal punishment, unless he saved himself by giving Brabant a large sum of money. So convincing was this simulation of the dead, that Cornu believed it was a miracle and immediately delivered the money to Brabant.

Many wise people were obviously unaware of the art of ventriloquism and how it could be applied. Perhaps, if Saul was so taken in by the Witch of Endor that he lost his life; if a wooden idol could finger an innocent victim; and if Brabant's confidence game could succeed so gainfully in a social setting, there are countless other political and historical events which may have been influenced by ventriloquists playing the role of seer. Certainly, under the guise of the occult, ventriloquism has continued to flourish throughout the centuries, evolving into modern day spiritualism. In an attempt to combat this practice, every era has its enlightened leaders who painstakingly tried to debunk the myths by revealing the tricks of the trade.

One of the first exposés appeared in 1584. An English writer, Reginald Scot, published a work entitled *The Discouerie of Witchcraft*. It explained how various tricks, passed off as "magic," meaning sorcery, were done. It even revealed how 'Ventriloquie' was accomplished and used to deceive. With great clarity, Scot stated that 'witches' were not possessed by evil spirits but were merely plying the art of ventriloquism which, at that time, was a well-kept secret.[2] Only those who practiced it were aware of the method. In 1584, most of the population was illiterate; only the clergy, or the wealthy, were able to read or could afford reading matter, so these revelations had little effect on the people's attempts to communicate with the 'departed' and the practice continued to fascinate and frighten the populous.

An old, long obsolete word shows how people of the time thought. The Oxford English Dictionary [OED] says [emphasis added]:

> hariolate, v. Obs. Cf. also ariolate, etc. f. L. hariolat-, ppl. stem of hariolari to divine, foretell, f. hariolus soothsayer. intr. To soothsay; also, in 17th c., **to practise ventriloquism**. Hence hariolating
>
> 1592 Warner Alb. *Eng*. vii. xxxv. (1612) 168 The lad was loftie, for himself he hariolized well, At full he could his lessons, and a formale lie would tell. [here he is lying]
>
> 1656 Blount *Glossogr*., Hariolation, a fore-telling or South-saying.
>
> 1656 T. Ady *Candle in Dark* 80 The **imposture of Hariolating or speaking in the belly**. [Note: Imposture means impersonation, like imposter. This same reference, in the same book, appears below]

Similarly, this old word shows the "devilish" connection as well. Even with the revelations, ventriloquism was not seen in a positive way at that time, and some of that attitude lingers to this day, especially in some religious quarters. [OED] [emphasis added]

> harr, v. Obs. or dial. Also 9 haur. Of echoic origin: cf. arr v.2, hurr v. intr. To snarl as a dog; to make a rough guttural trill. Hence

harring vbl. sb. (in Montg. harrand).

1656 T. Ady *Candle in Dark* 77 A witch or false prophet as had that **devilish imposture of harring in their throats to deceive the people, called of some Ventriloquism.**

Margaret Fox (1833-1893) was an American spiritualist who, with her sister Katherine (1839?-1892), known as "Kate," purported to communicate with spirits through mysterious rappings and *séances*. Their activities were largely responsible for the widespread American fascination with spiritualism in the mid 1800s. This theme recurs in stories and movies, almost in cycles. However there were other places that looked at it as well. According to the OED:

Nagualism. f. Central American *nagual*, a guardian spirit, esp. some beast or bird, supposed to be inseparably attached to a person. A system of superstition and mysticism practised by a secret sect or society formerly existing in Central America.

1883 Brinton in *Folk-Lore Jrnl*. I. viii. 249 The learned Abbè..is not entirely satisfied that animal magnetism, ventriloquism, and such trickery, can explain the mysteries of nagualism, as the Central American system of the black arts is termed;

As will be seen, in a similar way, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle also felt that ventriloquism does not explain the voices. Meanwhile, in North America, after the Fox sisters came on the scene, many others made similar claims of communicating with the dead. John Wyman Jr., a well-known ventriloquist of that era, felt it was time to add an exposé of spiritualism to his performances. Similarly, years later the ever-curious Houdini, celebrated escape artist and magician, attended a *séance* hoping to communicate with his beloved mother. In good faith he sat at the round table and joined in as everyone held hands in a "circle of love." The lights in the room mysteriously grew dim, and a hush came over the group. Today dimmers are so commonplace no one would give it a second thought, but back then it was almost unheard of and quite eerie. Certainly some theaters used various methods, both electro-chemical and electrical, but no private home would be expected to have had them. Glowing, ghostly figures materialized and heavy objects appeared to move about eerily. The medium, in a deep trance, began conversing with the spirits of the dead, relaying questions from the guests. The spirits replied in appropriately "disembodied" voices.

Houdini conversed with his "mother," asking her "spirit" personal questions about himself. But he was disappointed. The answers he received effectively ended any belief he might have had in spiritualism. The "facts" revealed to Houdini by his "mother" were nothing more than biographical data commonly known about his well-publicized life and family. However, what thoroughly convinced him of the fraud was hearing his mother's "spirit" speak perfect English. His mother, an immigrant,

had never conversed in anything but fluent Yiddish! After the disclosure of this true incident, it joined a long list of jokes about mediums, some including ventriloquism, but along the way the Houdini reference was lost.

Disillusioned and disgusted, he dedicated himself to exposing all such fakery. Houdini was a world famous celebrity. He knew fraudulent mediums would instantly recognize him, so from time to time he visited various *séances* in disguise and brought such hoaxes to light. He never met any medium whose effects he could not duplicate even under test conditions. By reporting his findings to the press in detail, he managed to help phase out the popularity of that era's spiritualist movement.

The famous face on the left in disguise on the right

Houdini was a tireless crusader against fraudulent spiritualists. He exposed them individually and lectured on their trick methods. The photo shows him demonstrating the secrets behind making eerie looking "spirit hands" from paraffin, which were used to dupe the unsuspecting.

Houdini showing wax models of "spirit" body parts.

Unfortunately, there always seem to be those who are naive enough to believe in the unknown, no matter how obvious the chicanery may seem. Even today, though often exposed as tricksters, mediums continue to be consulted. New generations still need to be informed and educated about their underhanded methods. My dear friend, psychic researcher and Episcopal priest, the Reverend Canon William V. Rauscher has attended many *séances* in the course of his investigations. He reports that conditions today are similar to those which faced Houdini. Mediums still use the distraction of darkness to cover their vocal mimicry. Obviously, under such conditions, they need hardly resort to skilled ventriloquial technique to conceal facial movement. His investigation led to writing a book which exposes the methods.

Reverend Rauscher

Reverend Rauscher collaborated with Lamar Keene, nationally known psychic medium, in 1976, on a book entitled *The Psychic Mafia*. In it, Keene relates experiences from his long and successful career as a fraudulent spiritual medium, and describes some of the trickery behind the scenes. For example, he wrote, "I used a trumpet with luminous bands on it so that in the darkness, relieved by only a single red bulb, the sitters could see the trumpet apparently floating around the room while numerous distinctly different spirit voices issued from it. The voices, of course, were all me. I was a helluva good ventriloquist."

Of course in a dimly lit room, whether you were an oracle or a priest, great skill was not as essential. But not everyone could be so easily fooled and there were those who were skeptical of the skeptics. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, of Sherlock Holmes fame, wrote in *The Vital Message,* [George H. Doran Company, New York, 1919]:

> In the case of the direct voice one of the leading exponents is Mrs. French, an amateur medium in America, whose work is described both by Mr. Funk and Mr. Randall. She is a frail elderly lady, yet in her presence the most masculine and robust voices make communications, even when her own mouth is covered. I have myself investigated the direct voice in the case of four different mediums, two of them amateurs, and can have no doubt of the reality of the voices, and that they are not the effect of ventriloquism. (p. 43)

Take your pick, or take sides. The basic technique of ventriloquism served well enough from its inception, requiring only a little refinement or development of techniques as audiences became wiser and the light shone on the face of the performer on the stage. It is virtually the same today as it always was. It is available to all those who are clever and persistent enough to master its functions. The only nuances are in methods of presentation, type of figure used, if any, and the personal charisma of the performer. Though now a force for fun, not evil, we will never know to what extent this impressive art form has influenced our lives or even in what fashion, for it was only after ventriloquism was widely known that people would look to it as an explanation. For example, people had finally become so suspicious of it that even the latest and most wondrous scientific marvels were suspect. The following notation in the "Minutes of the Paris Academy of Sciences" documents one reception of the first phonograph, and the fervent suspicions of the skeptical listeners:

> No sooner had the machine emitted a few words than the Permanent Secretary threw himself upon [the man conducting the demonstration], seizing his throat in a grip of iron. 'You see, gentlemen,' he exclaimed; 'what it is. . . .' But, to the stupefaction of everyone present, the machine continued to utter sounds.[3]

Remember, at that time many people believed ventriloquism was a vaguely understood method of making things talk. There were no phonographs, radios, speakers, or recorders yet, to explain "it" away, but explain it they did. Ironically, as time moved on and people became more familiar with radios and recorders, those devices would be credited with the voices created by deft ventriloquists! As science peeled back some of the world's darkest mysteries, scientists sought to explain the phenomenon of ventriloquism accurately. It is hard to imagine how many convoluted methods both ancient and relatively recent "scientists" managed to concoct, but over time they developed a series of theories.

Chapter III

A Series of Theories

The Complex Explanations of An Elementary Art

Human nature being what it is, probably just after the first person achieved the feat of ventriloquism, a second person formed a theory as to how it was done.

Today the "secrets" are out in the open. Many ventriloquists who perform for youngsters have had some of the youngsters come up after a performance and say, "I know how you did that!" Some, with mouth clenched, may say, "I can do that too! See!" However, that was not always the case. At one time it was common for people to believe that trees and rocks could actually talk because they "knew" spirits inhabited all of nature, a belief called "animism." which is still a part of the beliefs of Native Americans.[4] For those with a scientific leaning, that concept came under scrutiny. Many were self-styled scientists and investigators, who, with little or no cooperation from ventriloquists, analyzed the apparent effects. They began to realize that the voices were not coming from the rocks, but from people, even though they didn't move their lips. Without specifically studying the actual techniques, however, they evolved strange and quaint explanations of how this could be accomplished, all of which were, eventually, proven to be far-fetched.

Early ventriloquists, of course, knew that what they were presenting was not as involved, nor as complex, as the uninitiated believed. However, they would either not verify or deliberately deny the countless assumptions of how it was done, since their ability to perform it had become a status symbol. For example, John Rannie, an early American ventriloquist said, in one of his handbills; "This extraordinary power of speaking from the belly is altogether a natural gift and impossible to be acquired by anyone." He was not the only one to make that claim. Quite content to have it considered an esoteric mystery, which maintained the intrigue, they were unwilling to reveal that, depending upon aptitude and surely with some practice, many people could usually achieve the basic technique, which today is explained in books for the public. Yet it is almost impossible to become a ventriloquist by merely reading a book because it is an accomplishment for which there is no one scientific method. As Dan Ritchard explains in his excellent book, *Ventriloquism for the Total Dummy*, "Just as it isn't possible to learn to swim by standing on land, you can't learn ventriloquism just by watching. You can learn *about* ventriloquism by reading, but

if you want to know how to *do* it, you have to give it a try."[5] A book can only give someone a head start on the path to discovering whether or not they have an aptitude for this multifaceted art. In fact, professional performers each develop their own methods and styles of presentation, making it more difficult to analyze. Clearly, the people who proposed the following theories did not follow the advice recommended by Mr. Ritchard. They seem to have done too much guessing, too little listening, scant experimenting and hardly any analytical thinking.

The Anatomy of a Theory: With little cooperation from the ventriloquists, those misguided, and deliberately misdirected, investigators and pseudo scientists had to develop theories on their own, to explain ventriloquism in any way they could. One way was to figure out what traits were exhibited by those who are adept at it. While they did not necessarily label the theories, it is easier to identify them with relevant names such as:

The Phrenological Theory: It does not attempt to study or explain ventriloquism itself, or reveal its methods, but purports to "explain" who might have the tendency toward it. What it actually helps to explain is why these scientists had so little to go on. To begin with, Phrenology was a popular fad, a pseudo-science, which had no basis in fact. It presumed that specific bumps on the head would determine an individual's talents, characteristics and personality traits. That alone would lead them astray. In 1824, James Simpson, founder of phrenology, claimed that only those persons born with at least two particularly well developed phrenological bumps on their heads could become ventriloquists. He claimed that the required bumps were those of imitativeness and secretiveness. No surprise here, especially since the ventriloquists of his day were polyphonists imitating sounds and they were quite secretive about what they did and how they did it. They left the inquirers guessing, and phrenology faded away. But it was not the first attempt to explain ventriloquism.

There were several ideas that non-ventriloquists had about how the phenomenon was accomplished. This led to basically two analytical approaches that evolved, though they did cover similar ground. One was to determine the unique acoustic qualities of the ventriloquial sounds, the other was to reveal the source of that sound, the elusive, illusive ventriloquial voice. Skeptics, eliminating the supernatural, naturally were led to suggesting various organs of the person doing it. While they ruled out supernatural, they did not rule out natural oddities. One theory postulated that a ventriloquist had to be born with a split tongue. Other areas were suggested, as well. The 'voice' was thought to emanate from the head, the ears, the nostrils, the armpits, the chest, the belly, the genitals and even the anus of the performer. Ironically, the most logical source, the throat itself, with the sound passing through the oral and nasal cavities, was about the last part to be considered. The net result was to develop some overlapping theories.

The Disease Theory: It supposedly began about 400 B.C. when Hippocrates, the Father of Medicine, described in his *Book of Epidemics*, a pulmonary or lung disease which afflicted some people at that time. It noted that their wheezing had a

ventriloquial quality to it. This was then misinterpreted to mean that ventriloquism was a disease and that only those who were stricken with the disease could perform ventriloquism. Unfortunately this is repeated by many authors over the years who do not take into account the fact that Hippocrates wrote nothing down. The books were written by his followers and students, many years after his death. Therefore any mention of "his" theories is simply not provable and, though interesting, carries no more historical weight than any other.

The Inhalation Theory: Just as one wheezes when the pulmonary system is not healthy or functioning the way it should be, this theory asserted that the phenomenon was simply the result of speaking while *inhaling*, instead of exhaling. The originator of this theory never explained why, after having learned this simple secret, he was unable to ventriloquize!

Many youngsters discover this odd method of speech by themselves, but it is merely a small part of their youthful exploration of how the body works. A fairly recent book, by a respected ventriloquist, actually suggests this method, along with other instruction, but it is not recommended because the throat was not designed to do this and it could cause damage, especially with the prolonged practice necessary to achieve the lip control required for the illusion. It has no advantage over normal methods, which are easier. Part of the problem is that the outside air coming in dries out the membranes of the oral cavity, rather than the natural way of speaking which blows moisturized air from the lungs over them. The other is that the vocal chords are roughly vibrated or even rubbed together because of the reverse airflow turbulence. The odd raspy sound which this produces is similar to that of Ventricular Phonation, the focus of:

Manual Garcia (1805 -1906) was a Spanish singing teacher in London. In 1855 he invented the, then, modern laryngoscope which remained the basis of the instrument for many years, until new high tech methods of examining the vocal chords superceded it.

The Double Throat Theory: This seemingly logical idea suggested that the ventriloquist was born with an extra set of vocal cords in his throat, a variation put the extra set of vocal cords in the belly. While at first it may seem logical for a ventriloquist to have a double throat and the suggestion of another set of vocal cords is interesting, it, too, does not explain how the words were formed without the use of the person's lips, which, whether one throat or two, is the basis of the art.

Although there is no extra set of vocal cords either in the belly or the throat, there are such things called "False Vocal Cords," which provide a sound scientific basis for the pseudoscientific misunderstanding. In all humans there is a mucous membrane which covers the inside of the larynx. Alongside the vocal cords that are used for the voice, the mucous membrane overlaps itself, and these two flaps are also called "ventricular folds," (note another possibility for misunderstanding, the similarity between ventricular and ventriloquist!) In most of the population, they close involuntarily when swallowing, to protect the vocal cords, and are not usually under voluntary control. Because they are also known as "false vocal cords," they may be the mysterious second set of the "double throat" theory, though they are

normally not used to produce the voice. However, some individuals can cause air passing by to vibrate the folds and produce a low-pitched hoarse whisper which can be formed into words. This process is referred to as 'ventricular phonation.'[6] When it happens involuntarily it is considered a speech impediment and requires training to overcome. But then, why worry about some difficult skill or anatomical aberration when you can buy the technique, according to:

The Mechanical Theory: The favorite of skeptics and sales pitches, it maintained that a mechanical gadget which was concealed in the mouth created the special effect of ventriloquism. The idea of such a device is still promoted by ads in comic books. [See box, right] What they sell is a small semicircular disk of metal containing a reed. Concealed in the mouth, it is used to create a high-pitched sound, which the tongue and lips form into words, after some practice. Used primarily by "Punch and Judy" performers — who have often been known to swallow them accidentally — for Punch's voice, in that old puppet show of Italian origin. It was quite popular in England at one time, even though it features domestic violence. The phrase, "Pleased as Punch," comes from the smug pleasure exhibited by that character of low character, at his misdeeds.

SECRETS OF VENTRILOQUISM
OR HOW TO
THROW YOUR VOICE
THE VENTRILO
The Ventrilo Bird Call, or Double Thrust as it is sometimes called, is of great aid to ventriloquists. It is placed in the mouth, and with it you can, after a little practice, imitate different birds and beasts. Used by professional ventriloquists, vaudeville entertainers and others. One Ventrilo Bird Call accompanies this book, and additional ones can be obtained at 5 for 10 cents, or $1.00 per 100 postpaid.
JOHNSON SMITH & CO.
Racine, Wisconsin

Typical ad for the reed, which, it claimed, would make you a ventriloquist who could throw your voice anywhere.

The theory that was most common, though also erroneous, seemed to attain the most credibility and the widest impact. It was:

The Belly Theory: Before 1650 or so gastromancy is described as divination by sounds or signs of the belly. By the 1700s it began to be attributed to ventriloquism, while misdiagnosing the method! Here is what they said in 1718.

> Bp Hutchinson Witchcraft 11 There are also many that can **form Words and Voices in their Stomach**, which shall seem to come from others rather than the Person that speaks them. Such people are call'd Engastriloques, or Ventriloquists. [Capitalization original, Bolding added for emphasis] [From the OED Second Edition]

Forming words in the stomach? How did they get out? By 1855 that idea seems to have waned and we get this explanation from: [Bold added]

> Elihu Rich in Smedley et al. *Occult Sci.* 323. gastromancy, Or divination from the belly, is now generally explained by ventriloquism, the voice in both cases sounding low and hollow, as if issuing from the ground. Slaverte enforces this opinion, and adds: - "The name of *Engastrimythes*, given by the Greeks to the Pythi" (priestesses of Apollo), indicates that they made use of this artifice." The explanation is only partial, and the text of Isaiah - "thy voice shall die as one that hath a familiar spirit" - is inapplicable in such an

> argument. Those who are experienced in Clairvoyance are aware that the voice is often reduced very low, in consequence of a change in the respiration. This was the case with some of the ancient Pythonesses, though instances may have occurred when ventriloquism was resorted to, as by the wizards of Greenland in our own time. The **surprising illusions of Mr. Love, the polyphonist,** may be instanced in proof of what may be accomplished in this way. Another method of practising the ancient gastromancy connects it with crystal-seeing, as vessels of glass, round, and full of clear water, were used, which were placed before several lighted candles. In this case a young boy or girl was generally the seer, **and the demon was summoned in a low voice by the magician.** Replies were then obtained from the magical appearances seen in the illuminated glass vessels. Thereafter, the Greek word for 'belly seer' or 'belly talker,' was used for persons who could speak in this manner. They were known as *Engastromyths,* a term which is still used today. [then]

While just about every possible situation or substance has been used for "divination," from animal droppings to candle flames, perhaps the stomach rumblings of digestion were what set off gastromancy, especially if they seemed to sound like words, much as clouds might take recognizable form to someone with a fertile imagination, then ventriloquists added their own touch. Another rare word was "gastriloquist"along with "gastriloquy," and other variations. The OED lists:

> **1731** Bailey vol. II, *Gastriloquous*, speaking out of the belly.
> **1785** Reid *Int. Powers* ii. xxii. 298 The deception..which is said to be produced by Gastriloquists.
> **1831** Hooper *Med. Dict., Gastroloquism*: see *Ventriloquism*.
> **1848** Craig, *Gastriloquy*, a manner of speaking that seems to proceed from the belly.
> **1864** A. McKay *Hist. Kilmarnock* 259 The greatest success has attended his..gastriloquial displays.

Seers flourished in the pre-Biblical days of polytheism, when the ventriloquial utterance was thought to be the voice of some pagan god. That notion, of course, was fostered by the priests and oracles, whose fortunes, and daily well-being, depended upon their ability to maintain that aura of fear and superstition as well as medicine men who enhanced their standing and the efficacy of their treatments.

During the Biblical era, and beyond, when monotheism prevailed in some parts of the world, it would have been sacrilegious to suppose that God would speak through a mere mortal. Idol worship was banned. Therefore, it became a common belief that the ventriloquial voice was that of a demon which inhabited the body of the ventriloquist and spoke through their belly. Though that belief was not held by

everyone, the belly remained a major focus, whether 'just voices' or 'demons' were doing the talking. The Latin version of the Greek *Engastromyth*, or belly-talker, became our 'Ventriloquist'. (*Venter* - belly and *Loquor* - talk.) Additionally;

> ventri.kiular, a. Chiefly Anat. and Path. f. L. ventricul-us (see next) + -ar, or ad. mod.L. *ventricularis. So Fr. ventriculaire.1. Of or pertaining to the stomach; abdominal, gastral, ventral

The OED offers "ventricular" only as a medical term in anatomy and pathology. Unless, perhaps, as indicated by the citation above, **"1831** Hooper *Med. Dict.*, *Gastroloquism*: see *Ventriloquism*," because it had been medical men and scientists who "studied" the phenomenon of voices erroneously believed to be coming from the stomach, they had been the ones who named it, hence the possibility that they are connected. Though the OED does not make any additional connection between ventricular and ventriloquism the way it does so clearly for "gastral," and it is not a good idea to jump to the conclusion without further investigation or proof, it does raise the reasonable possibility that there still might be. The Greek culture was far-reaching. Cultures the world over seem to have had similar ideas. A look at other languages illustrates that their names for it are not unique, but what is the link?

Afrikaans	*Beukspreker* (Beuk - stomach and spreker - speaker
Arabic	*Al-Motakallmo Min Batnihi*
Czech	*Brichomluvel*
Danish.	*Bugtaler*
Dutch	*Bulkapreker*
Dutch	*Bauchsprecher* (Bauch - belly and sprecher - speaker)
English	Ventriloquist
French	*Ventriloque* (Ventro -belly and loque - speak)
German	*Bauchrader* (Bauch - belly and rader - speaker)
Greek	*Engastrmythos*
Italian	*Ventriloquo*
Japanese	*Fukuwa* (Fuku - stomach plus wa - to talk)
Latin	*Ventriloquus*
Russian	*Chrevoveshchatel* (Chrevo - belly and veshchatel - talking)
Spanish	*Ventrilocuo*
Swedish	*Boksprekker* (Bok - belly and sprekker - speaker)
Swedish	*BuRtalare*
Turkish	*Karnindan Konusan Ventrolog*

Obviously, the word ventriloquism travels well and loses little in translation. However, the most colorful, and complimentary, name of all is from India, a land of many languages. One of its contributions, consisting of a single word containing 21

letters, is defined as 'excellent exponent of the art of ventriloquism,' which gives us the formidable '*shabdabhramakalaratna*.' Which pretty much fills up a marquee.

Though the belly was the focus, there was a question as to how the words got in there in the first place, which naturally would lead to something like:

The Swallowing Air Theory: This theory is somewhere between the "Belly Theory" (above) and the Echo Theory (below) This hypothesis assumed that ventriloquists swallowed large gulps of air and, when they spoke, somehow managed to vibrate the air in their stomach so that the voice would emanate from the belly instead of the throat. It is different from the "Echo Theory" because only the air was swallowed, not whole words and sentences. Though it "explained" how the words got in, it did not explain how the voice got out of the belly. Oddly enough, this theory seems to parallel the development of esophageal speech or belching speech, first reported in the literature as early as 1841. This method is used today by some cancer victims who have had their larynx surgically removed, though electronic tone generators are more commonly used to provide the sound substituting for the voice. The patient swallows huge gulps of air, but they do get out, they are burped, or belched, out directly from the stomach, and the bubbly belching sound is then formed into speech with the tongue and lips. Thus, except for the focus on using the belly to store swallowed air, there is no actual connection as far as ventriloquism is concerned, and the theory itself is hard to swallow.

The Echo Theory: It will be seen that Echo will also be used for the name of a character in a movie.[7] By the way, the thought that often goes into the choice of names — by authors and playwrights for themselves, as pen names, as well as for their characters, along with performers, including ventriloquists, for their stage names, and of course, their figures — follows a long tradition. Those and even names of products, cities and streets, can be based on anything from relatives, friends, heroes, words, anagrams, puns, sounds, traits, characters in literature, signs, or even other more subtle meanings, and some of these will be pointed out along the way.

The Echo explanation was devised in 1800 by John Gough. It proposed that the ventriloquist somehow managed to swallow his words, and thereby disguise their true source. In some peculiar manner, an echo of those very words would be created and caused to explode like a bombshell at any point he chose (throw his voice) — in the room, outside of the house, above or below the audience, directly behind the listener or even under the listener's seat. This theory is the most fun of them all and stirs the imagination with visions of delightful pranks. The use of the word "echo" for the theory is intriguing, but the theory is not sound. These fallacies persist right up to the present time. Let's explore some of them and see how they developed from the combination of erroneous theories, skillful, secretive practitioners and imaginative writers who fostered the fantasies, like Henry Cockton did. He seems to have been so taken with the Echo Theory that he created a character who is the best ventriloquist ever; whose name is the title of his novel; a name which has since been adopted by some real ventriloquists and, fittingly, is the title of the next chapter.

Chapter IV

The Fictional Legacy of Valentine Vox

Ask people what a ventriloquist does and the answer is often, "They throw their voice!" A moment's reflection will tell you that this is impossible. A voice, having no weight or physical substance like a rock or a ball cannot be "thrown." Nevertheless, the myth that a voice can be thrown, and the ventriloquist has the power to do so, persists. Sooner or later, after a show or at a party at which I've performed, a would-be practical joker with a devilish smile will approach me. Sometimes they are just making a casual tongue-in-cheek joke, as if they were the first person in the universe to ever have come up with the idea, and I smile politely, for the umpteenth time. Perhaps there are times when it is just intended as a compliment. From time to time they seriously attempt to draft me into becoming a co-conspirator. The scheme they have in mind usually requires that I project a self-incriminating remark across a crowded room and make it appear to come out of some innocent victim. This is by no means a new phenomenon. Senator Henry Clay once made a similar proposal to Signor Blitz. [See "Roots..."]

Reader's Digest Illustrated Reverse Dictionary. New York: Reader's Digest Association, 1990

This is a clever idea for a dictionary which helps you find the word you want when you only know a concept, but you have to think of the concept exactly the way it lists it. When you look up "throwing the voice" it tells you "ventriloquism."

The requests are usually along the same lines: "Mr. Burns, see that grey haired woman in the striped dress? That's my mother-in-law. When I get back to the table, make her tell everybody she's moving out of my house. We'll have some fun."

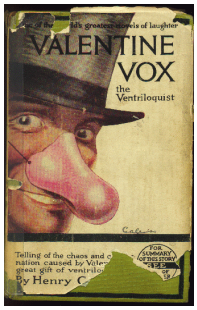
Or they suggest something like this. "That disheveled guy, in the loud suit over there; that's my brother-in-law, a real chiseler. Send the waiter over and make it look like he's asking for the check. The shock should kill him."

Throughout my career as a ventriloquist I've been asked to perform some of the most impossible feats imaginable. In this instance I could not tell if he was just pulling my leg or really serious, but one seemingly desperate father approached me with this request. "My son is a poor reader, and he can't remember his lines. But he has to give a short presentation at a meeting. If he just moves his mouth and you sat near him, could you do the talking and everyone will think it's him making the speech?" It sounded like a scheme better suited to Cyrano de Bergerac. No, I could not! Nor could anyone. I begged off and wished him luck.

Try as we may to explain the technique as simple aural deception, the cliché continues to be believed; throw the voice all over the place, make someone appear to speak, usually saying something embarrassing, or while you are standing ten feet away from someone, make them think they are hearing voices! Not bad for ventriloquists, and illusions like it would be rather impressive in the course of a show, until someone makes those impossible requests up close — for real. In his1863 book, *Origin and History of Ventriloquism*, Prof. Kirbye wrote:

Kirbye on the cover of his book

> HOW FAR CAN YOU THROW YOUR VOICE? &c. [Etc.]
>
> This question, absurd as it may seem to many, is, nevertheless, frequently made use of, and often by those persons whom we would least suspect to be ignorant of the true facts. To be as brief as possible, I would add the following sufficient answer for all questions similar to the above. No ventriloquist has the power to cast, throw, or convey any sounds whatsoever from his body to that of another locality; but, by the principle already explained, he may imitate almost any sound that he may choose so completely as to deceive the most acute ear.

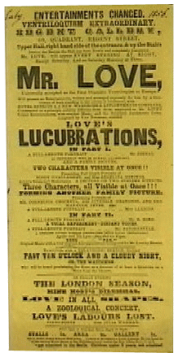


The book's dust jacket

A Love handbill

Where did these wild ideas originate? My colleagues and I believe many of the modern myths and misconceptions can be traced to *The Life and Adventures of Valentine Vox the Ventriloquist* by Henry Cockton. It was an extremely popular, old Victorian, comic novel which was first published in 1840.

Valentine Vox is currently out of print and virtually unknown except to the ventriloquial community. While, today's reading public may not be aware of the book, as these modern anecdotes illustrate, there are people who still accept as fact many of the fallacies it fostered.



Cockton was intrigued by the real and fanciful feats of contemporary ventriloquists. He was obviously influenced by the performances of such artists as William E. Love, a popular vocal trickster of the day who produced voices which appeared to be far away. So deceptive were these "distant voices" that the press and public accused him of having several assistants hidden behind the scenery! In the 1840's George Smith wrote a book with the long title: *Memoirs and anecdotes of Mr. Love, the polyphonist : to which is added an explanation of the phenomenon of polyphony...* Love was well known and Cockton was also aware of the highly acclaimed

William E. Love

performer, as well as Monsieur Alexandre (Nicholas Vattemare). In some quarters it was believed that Alexandre [See "Charlie Awards"] was the actual inspiration for Cockton's hero, Valentine Vox. Cockton made Valentine an attractive young man with a wild sense of humor. His last name is based on the Latin word for voice —"vox" while "Valentine" is not only an alliterative match for the sound, but also carries the passionate meaning of a person singled out, especially as one's sweetheart, on Saint Valentine's Day, a concept believed to be first suggested by Chaucer.[8] This emotional aspect is clearly expressed in Cockton's preface, on the flap of the book:

> "Ventriloquism gives its possessor an unlimited command over the actions, the feelings, the passions of men."

Oh, were that only so! Though highly exaggerated, Cockton was quite fascinated with this fantasy. The story starts with Vox being mesmerized while watching a ventriloquist at a theatre. Surely, many other ventriloquists started that way. However, Valentine goes further than reality. In a classic, though fantastic, enactment of the echo theory, he decides to try his hand at the game, as Henry Cockton tells us:

> To his great astonishment, Valentine Vox found that he possessed remarkable powers of throwing his voice in any direction he chose. After long and assiduous practice, he ventured to try his skill at a public meeting, with astonishing results.[9]

Hardly! No one can throw their voice in **any** direction. But, as the tale goes, from that moment on his life became one long series of incredible (incredible means "not to be believed" and is quite accurate) adventures. Cockton let his imagination run riot and did not limit his hero's shenanigans to things done on stage. No, he gave them a much broader scope. After that public meeting he had Vox perform a vast catalog of contrived, impossible, but thoroughly entertaining ventriloquial stunts, leading his readers to accept the incredible as doable. Wherever he went, according to his "biographer," people were awed when they heard ghostly voices, ethereal sounds, and voices from all over the place, which defy what we know as reality. However, this novel has nothing to do with reality.

Reality dictates that the **apparent source** of the sound must be closer to the ventriloquist who is making the sound, than the person who is listening— the one who is supposed to be fooled by the illusion. A person standing next to a closet cannot be fooled by any ventriloquist supplying a suitable voice if the ventriloquist is standing even a short distance away from the person and the closet, while claiming there is someone inside there talking. The supposed victim of the hoax will hear the sound coming from the direction of the ventriloquist. Period! For the "aurallusion" to work, the ventriloquist has to be near the "source," and between it and the listener, who is further away.

It appears that Cockton thoroughly embraced the "echo theory" or it's apparent effects as demonstrated by those he had seen performing, and applied it to Vox's exploits. Here are some more of the hoaxes he supposedly performed.

While traveling as a passenger on a coach, Vox causes several people to think that a mad dog is about to attack them. He makes them believe this even though they are closer than he is to the place where they imagine the supposed canine to be.

Vox imitates a baby crying. (This can be done, and many have done it well, even some modern performers "— Vox," have made reputations with it.) The astonished coachman gets down from his perch in order to search for the child who, supposedly, has been thrown off the coach. At the time, Vox is surrounded by the other passengers, who are closer to the sound than the driver. Amazingly, they do not hear the weeping child, or any other sound emanating from the ventriloquist's direction. (This **cannot** be done by anyone.)

While dining in a crowded restaurant, Vox has several people appear to call the waiter. This poor soul, confused and puzzled, runs from one diner to another unsuccessfully trying to locate the callers. (If a real ventriloquist attempted it, he would be quickly found out and possibly escorted out!)

Half a dozen men race to dig up the ground to release a man they believe is buried alive. If you guessed Vox was behind it, you did better than they did.

During an auction, the bids offered rise to astronomical amounts. Vox does this by giving the impression that many people are bidding furiously. (Maybe he could get away with one bid, if he were lucky, but anyone sitting next to him would know he did it.) He "makes" an oil painting speak. At Mme. Toussaud's Wax Works, voices (via Vox) appear to come from the inanimate celebrity figures.

He goes merrily on, with stunt after stunt. Henry Cockton's novel was great fun and so convincing that it left a legacy of propaganda; impossible examples to follow, for the real live ventriloquists of that day and of the future. Though sound travels at 1100 feet per second, it is not silent on its journey from one point to another. It would surely be detected if a ventriloquist tried to emulate any of Vox's tricks. However, reality never deterred would-be vent dabblers from trying to do a "Valentine Vox," or be one, for that matter. Though he never lived, he has been the inspiration for others. In a classic example of life imitating art, some performers, at different times and in different countries, actually adopted the hero's name, Valentine Vox, as their stage name. In America, in 1925, when vaudeville was in bloom, a French Canadian named Wilfred Moran chose to be known as Valentine Vox. He joined Emily Walters who had split from "Walters and Walters" to create the team "Vox and Walters," who soon became one of our country's most famous vaudeville acts, with a stage sketch featuring an imitation of a baby crying. (Like the original Vox, but not crying in the middle of the audience as Cockton would surely have loved!) Currently, another English ventriloquist has adopted it and is

Vox and Walters and Buttons, the Bellhop.

performing and writing under the classic name. He is the author of *I Can See Your Lips Moving: the History and Art of Ventriloquism*. He has developed a museum and has recently organized ventriloquist gatherings in Las Vegas, Nevada. Though he is well known from his earlier years in this career, we will respect his wishes regarding his name.

In the 1930s, a Canadian comic strip appeared entitled, "Val Fox, The Boy Wonder Ventriloquist And His Merry Pets." Although the name was Fox, *not* Vox, it was close enough to the original to let us know where the cartoonist borrowed the idea. It, too, probably helped to perpetuate the myths.

In 1900, what, or who, influenced L. Frank Baum, author of *The Wizard of Oz*, to make this reference? In Chapter Fifteen, Dorothy asks the "wizard" how he made the large *papier-mâché* head of the mysterious wizard speak: [Emphasis added]

> "But how about the voice?" she inquired.
>
> "Oh, I am a ventriloquist," said the little man. "I can **throw the sound of my voice wherever I wish**, so that you thought it was coming out of the Head.[10]

The Wizard is a kindly charlatan who used to work in a circus as a performer. Understandably, that part was dropped when the movie was made, and a more visual effect substituted. In another case of "throwing" the voice, there was an episode of the television show *Wild Wild West*, "The Night of the Sedgewick Curse," where Artie is strapped to a gurney. He awakens to find Dr. Maitlen filling a syringe with an experimental drug. Artie throws his voice to get the evil Dr. out of the room, and then empties the syringe and refills it with water. This is presented here because it is more appropriate to the discussion of "throwing" the voice, than to the chapter on television. Cartoons and stories abound with this prank, usually calling the victim, from "different" places of course, who then chases all around, while the prankster smirks.

The reality behind the aural illusions of so-called "throwing" of a ventriloquist's voice, throws a new light on the ventriloquist, and his listeners' ears, which should never be between the ventriloquist and the suggested origin of the voice or sound. Anyone in the middle will surely turn to the ventriloquist as the true source of the sound. The audience also has to imagine the illusion to join in the fun. Frederic (The Great) Maccabe, a ventriloquial headliner of the early 1900s wrote.

Alfred Hitchcock and The Three Investigators in The Mystery of the Whispering Mummy
by Robert Arthur
New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1965 (paperback)

That's mummy, not dummy. You might think that because this book is mentioned here that it has something to do with ventriloquism, and you would be right — well, only partly right. Though somewhat dated, and a little bit far-fetched, it is a clever, well written mystery suited to adolescents. It is one in a series of mystery adventures in which the three teen investigators get involved. How a mummy might whisper is only part of the story, but to tell more about it here would be unfair to the potential reader, while serving no purpose in advancing this chapter. Though the book is out of print, suffice it to say it is worth mentioning, and reading — if you can get your hands on a copy — because it does exploit and examine the "throwing the voice" clichè in some unusual and interesting ways.

> The effect of ventriloquism is a creation of the imagination produced by a deception of the eyes and ears. The effect produced must be suggested to the mind at the moment that the sound is imitated, and the imagination of the audience thus made to help in the illusion. People go to see a ventriloquist and they appreciate his illusions because they expect to be deceived; and so they help him to deceive them. If a ventriloquist omitted to indicate the spot from which the voice is supposed to proceed, his listeners could not locate the sound.

True as Maccabe's explanation might be, much of the public goes on blithely choosing to believe the more fanciful fiction which had made Vox the unchallenged master of his chosen art. How can you challenge an illusion? If he had actually existed, he might have been canonized as the patron saint of all ventriloquists. Yet, did you happen to notice that, while Valentine Vox "put" voices into statues, containers and people, he did not actually use any kind of dummy, or ventriloquial figure as we know it? There is a fairly good reason for that. It seems that the figure with the moving mouth had only been invented about sixty-eight years earlier and, though performers were using them, the figure was just becoming popular in Cockton's time, along with "puppets" of sorts, a subject that Maccabe was none too happy about, but that's another story — "The Birth of the Dummy."

Frederic Maccabe on the cover of his book.

The Era, February 11, 1872, printed the following about a performance of Maccabe at The Strand Theatre:

"...Remarkable ventriloquism which astonishes as much as it amuses, to hear TWO, THREE and FOUR voices AT THE SAME TIME, proclaiming wisdom from the housetops, or exchanging salutations from the cellar, or welcoming a coming, or speeding a parting, guest and gradually dying away as the speaker is supposed to have left the house, is as clever as it is unusual."

Chapter V

The Birth of the Dummy

And Other Figures of Speech

George Bernard Shaw once said that America and Great Britain are two countries separated by a common language. Surely my British Brother and Sister ventriloquists noticed that in the title to this chapter I, like most American ventriloquists refer to the inanimate member of their ventriloquial team as "dummy," whereas in England "figure" is used exclusively and one never ever says "dummy." In America, dummy simply means "voiceless" but in England it refers to a baby's pacifier, with obvious implications. By any name, it has its own unique roots, which, oddly enough, are fairly recent. Ventriloquial characters apparently date from 1770, when Baron Von Mengen modified a nutcracker to create what may be the first figure with a moving mouth. Because primitive tribes did not keep written records, there is only anecdotal evidence that such tribes used masks, in religious ceremonies, which had movements controlled by a kind of twine, though not related to ventriloquism.

Considering that dolls were around for almost 40,000 years, by comparison, 1770 seems like only yesterday. Dolls were originally idols and had no moving mouth. Worshiped in religious ceremonies, they were not considered toys. About twenty-five hundred years ago when the Egyptians made clay figures in the image of servants, children could play with a doll-like toy. As a caricature of a human, it was a source of entertainment for young and old. The word itself is young. "Doll," meaning a child's toy representing a human being, seems to date from the 1700s.

Though not actually a doll, a type of carved head, which we will look at shortly, was often carried by some court jesters to amuse nobility in early eighteenth century England. Jesters were often found in the homes of nobles and in most medieval palaces, and were known as, "The Fool." There appears to have been more than just one type. One of these is the subject of some interesting medical viewpoints.

Dr. Stefan Schüling, whose stage name is "Stevo," is both an Orthopedic Doctor and a ventriloquist. At the Las Vegas Ventriloquist Convention, July 1998, he presented the acts on the International Show. At the International World Congress of the ISPO [International Society for Prosthetics and Orthotics] in Chicago in 1992, he presented the paper, "Showfreaks and Monsters," about people with congenital malformations, who, mostly in the past, but even now, are sometimes seen in carnival and circus side-shows. Here is a little background on his groundbreaking ideas.

Only recently have doctors looked back with 20/20 hindsight at Abraham Lincoln, by carefully studying pictures and descriptions of him. They determined he exhibited the signs of abnormal growth in which the patient is not only tall and gangly, but also suffers from weakness, joint problems and some distortion in proportion. Abnormalities include overly long arms, hands and fingers, and this combination of symptoms is called Marfan's Syndrome. It even had implications for aspects of ventriloquism in days of old, which will be examined later.

In the same manner, but with reverse characteristics, Dr. Schüling's analytical mind, combined with his sense of humor, has provided an insight into one type of court jester of a bygone era. There is a syndrome in which little people, as they prefer to be called today, have a type of dwarfism that is accompanied by an unusually quick, often biting wit. This is more than just compensating for their size, it seems to be a genetic component that accompanies the diminutive stature — a syndrome. He looked back and developed some unique ideas about what he fondly terms, "court jester syndrome," another name for a syndrome which he kindly shares here.

> I believe that we should examine a specific group of hereditary enzyme deficiencies called mucopolysaccharidosis. Several of the sub-types lead to disfigured facial features called gargoylism, which manifests as short necks, bulging eyes, a big tongue, or a flat nose, and sometimes with brain damage. Children suffering from some types die early. There is one type, (type IV), called Morquio-syndrome, that does not impede the brain development, in fact, some patients have been known to have been **quick witted and sharp**. Luis Morquio (1867 - 1935) described the syndrome in 1929 in Uruguay, later, in 1931, radiologist James Frederik Brailsford (1888 - 1961) described it in Birmingham, England, and so the medical name is often combined to Morquio-Brailsford-syndrome. The afflicted reach a height of 80 cm to 150 cm, [2' 8" to 5'] Though the five feet, at the high end, is normal height, the syndrome shows up because they still exhibit the characteristic short bent legs and arms, a short neck, sometimes a hump, a flat bridge of the nose. The result is that they look odd and cannot walk far. All in all they look a lot like the Hobbits [the name itself resembles hobble] in Tolkien´s works as in the paintings of the Hildebrandt brothers depicting scenes from Tolkien´s works. Looking back at this syndrome presents a challenge. What do we have to go on? Surely there are no accurate diagnoses. However, there are drawings, paintings and descriptions of court jesters, some with great accuracy (Francisco Goya's art, also Diego Rodriguez de Silva y Velasquez (1599-1660) in "Las Meninas," 1656, for example) which lead to a distant diagnosis across centuries and continents. Statistically, we recognize that many malformed or poorly developed infants would not have survived in those days. Infant mortality rates were generally high. However, we confidently assume

that some of these children did survive and became court jesters, probably **because** they were afflicted by Morquio´s disease or syndrome. Children who stopped growing in their bodies but excelled intellectually may have attracted public interest including that of monarchs in search of diversion, entertainment and "novelty." A short and disproportioned jester will not be a physical challenge or threat, and may in fact appeal to helping instincts, as well. Because they were also physically unable to do manual labor, they could not earn their keep in the regular manner, but they could provide witty company to the court and the children. Though short in stature they were high in status, since they were believed to be specially blessed by God, and so they enjoyed a certain immunity from rebuke, which was good because children and fools tell the truth and a court jester may have been both. Several monarchs are known to have collected special people, the King of Siam (the star of The King and I), Tsar Peter the Great, Pre-Columbian South American kings and others. Occasionally in movies, jesters may be more accurately portrayed by these "little people," the preferred term for people of very short stature.

Dr. Schüling's analysis throws a new light on this subject, and explains some aspects that have not been given their due. Of course, not all jesters were "little people. There were clever members of the court who made jokes or satirical comments, or perhaps, in the manner of a troubadour, made witty ditties. There was yet another type which was clearly mentally deficient or disturbed, but harmless. The former could get into trouble by being a bit injudicious. Entertaining the royal court with mocking, satirical comments, sometimes going a bit too far, he seemed to elude dire consequences, but sometimes only at the last minute, when another witty remark saved the day. The latter type was simple-minded and therefore looked upon as a ward. An example might be the character called #4 in the movie *Multiplicity*, whose childlike antics served as comic relief. In days of yore, "the fool" was considered to be blessed by God and, therefore, not responsible for his words or deeds. Because he was not locked away in a mental ward, and was given food, shelter and decent treatment, the jester was in some ways, living in a more humane, if not more enlightened time.

Note the little person on the right of this portion of this Velasquez painting, "Las Meninas"

While witty, acerbic, ventriloquial partners can appear to be little people with an attitude, there is yet another way in which jesters are connected to our art, with distant ancestors of our dummies or figures. The jesters with which most of us are familiar usually dressed in a colorful costume with a tri-pointed cloth cap which had bells

sewn on. He carried a *marotte* or bauble, a comedic version of the King's scepter, which consisted of a short staff topped by a carved likeness of the jester's head, complete with a miniature cap and bells. The jester talked to it and pretended the carved head was talking back to him in a funny voice, thus it is related to the evolution of our wisecracking ventriloquial sidekicks. The *marotte*, a heckler by design, usually made fun of the king, or a member of the court. The jester would then chide the wooden carving. The king was usually surrounded by "yes men," and when the character seemed to make even the mildest insult, it was a call for laughter. The medieval comedy routine placed great emphasis upon double entendre, wordplay and puns of varying quality, much as William Shakespeare did in many of his plays. The phrases, now archaic and with obscure meanings, convulsed the listeners of the day. The tarot card called "the fool" and its descendant, today's joker, remain his calling cards, which serve as tributes to the jester of yesteryear.

Using a simple stick puppet, or doll head, the jester was basically performing a form of puppetry, not ventriloquism. However, ventriloquism was used by pagan priests, mediums, witches, *shaman* and spiritualists to prey upon the ignorance of their followers, and medicine men to enhance their cures. Over time, through exposure and censure by the established church, these individuals lost much of their status. As knowledge and education dissipated the sense of fear, the sense of humor came to the fore. The cunning use of ventriloquism gradually turned from a manipulative ruse to an open form of entertainment, beyond the borders of Greece, where Eurycles had done it for fun.

Early performers, around the mid 1700s, originally presented a type of mimicry or polyphony, a word derived from Latin, meaning "many sounds." They were sometimes called polyphonists, and will be mentioned along the way. Each performer had their own specialties. Their lips did not move, so the sounds appeared to be heard coming from various places. The ploy was quite portable. All you needed was your voice, and any props you happened to find wherever you did your demonstration. To round out the program, they often included a song. What did they actually do? In 1869, Jesse Haney & Co., of New York, published: "*Haney's hand-book of ventriloquism : containing simple and explicit directions by which any one can acquire this amusing art, with numerous examples for practice : also instructions for making the magic whistle, for imitating birds, animals, and peculiar sounds of various kinds*." Which pretty much sums it up. The "sounds of various kinds" usually encompassed the wail of animals, calls of roosters, crows and other birds, the din of sawing, the sizzle of cooking, the sound of rain, wind and other recognizable noises.

Long before that book, and probably by chance, someone whose identity we will never know formed a fist with their bunched fingers, creating a funny-looking character. By moving the thumb up and down a lower jaw was created. Eyes painted, or more likely, drawn with charcoal or ashes, added to the human aspect of the "fist" face. As the thumb was wiggled, the figure appeared to be speaking and even seemed to change its expression.

Parents have entertained their children at bedtime with the hand that tells stories or says, “Good night.” How long has it been around? Probably as long as humans have had a hand to disguise. I wouldn’t be surprised if Adam used it to distract his quarrelsome sons, Cain and Abel! Though most likely discovered by accident, it has endured, or been reinvented, embellished and reintroduced in different forms, down through the ages, to amuse people of all ages.

Hogarth’s etching
(small section)

A 1753 etching by William Hogarth (1697-1764), the famous and prolific British satirist, shows one of the earliest depictions of this delightful distraction which has come down to us. In his beautiful and detailed etching, “The Election Entertainment,” a reveler covers the knuckles of his fist with a napkin and, along with eyes painted on his finger, amuses constituents at a political rally. Perhaps even then it was a commentary on some politician being a mere puppet!

A nutcracker that looks like a person.

German nutcrackers in the shape of people. The moving jaw crushes the shells.

Even though the talking hand, with its moving mouth, was an old and popular idea, ventriloquists still did not use actual dolls until Baron Von Mengen, of Vienna, originated what is believed to be the first mechanical figure, a carved wooden doll which he compared to a nutcracker. The mouth opened and closed by having it pivot on a peg inside. The wooden figure had an old brown face with enameled eyes polished with a natural gloss, and was costumed as a Turkish nobleman wearing a turban. It did not have arms or legs, but a coat hid that fact as well as the Baron’s left hand as he operated the mouth lever of the doll. He specifically describes how he used it along with his own ventriloquial technique, in this excerpt from his letter, dated March 20, 1770, to the author of one of the first, and most quoted, books about ventriloquism, Abbè de la Chappelle.

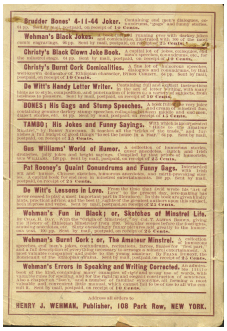
> I believe that the heathen priests had their idols speak in a similar method to mine, and more that the ventriloquial voice is produced between my left back teeth and cheek through hard pressure of the left part of the tongue. The breath for the words has to be available in the throat. This helps the voice form the words or even songs without having to use my lips. You do need though, a strong chest to maintain the breathing necessary to finish a sentence. [Translated from French]

The gift of the colorful enchanted “Nutcracker” for Christmas made it seem to be ideal for children but the original story, *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*, (1816) by E.T.A Hoffman was a kind of gory allegory for adults only. Alexander Dumas revised it as a children’s story and that is what we see in the toned down ballet version of the nutcracker’s transformations, so popular at Christmas. Like the figure with a moving mouth, the *Nutcracker* is now seen around the world

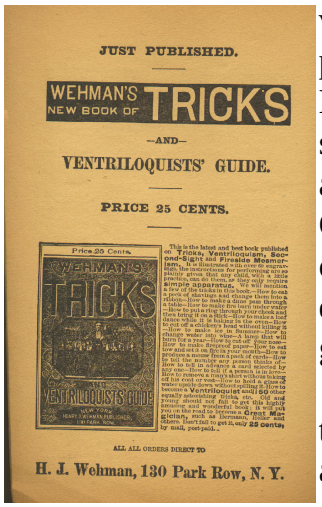
His technique is quite crude and seems as though it would result in a weak imitation of a Donald Duck type sound, rather than the richer voice produced by modern practitioners. Even so, having been the first to imagine the movable part of the nutcracker as the lower jaw of a mouth, Von Mengen gave us quite a legacy. His letter could be considered the birth certificate of the great-great-grandfather of all the ventriloquists' dummies which are in vogue today.

The talking hand remained perennially popular too. Its almost universal appeal has crossed the boundaries of period, place and position. Around 1796 the French King, Louis XVIII, considered it his favorite form of diversion when performed in his court by Comte de Griste.

More than a century after Hogarth's etching, the talking hand was acknowledged to be an old routine, used by clowns and described in books of entertainment of that day. In 1867, Frank Bellow mentioned the talking hand as a form of diversion in his book called *Art of Amusing*. Yet, two years later not everyone had embraced that "old novelty." There was some controversy among performers over what would seem to be a simple gambit.


Back of Maccabe's book

In 1869, someone billed as G.W. Jester, an Anglo-French ventriloquist, sporting a beard and mustache, proudly proclaimed himself, "The Man With The Talking Hand," in his advertisements. He gained some notice by splitting hairs and issuing a public "challenge" to the Great Maccabe which called for a contest to determine who was the greatest ventriloquist.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WEHMAN'S NEW BOOK OF TRICKS

—AND—

VENTRILOQUISTS' GUIDE.

PRICE 25 CENTS.

ALL ALL ORDERS DIRECT TO

H. J. Wehman, 130 Park Row, N. Y.

An advertisement in the book

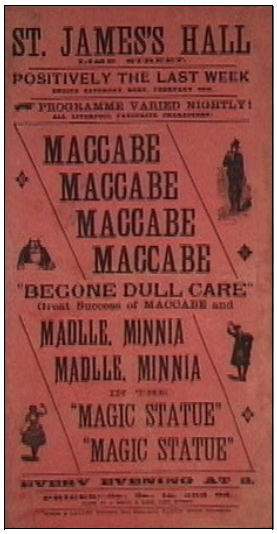
Frederic the First (and only)
Maccabe
In His World Renowned Entertainment
BEGONE DULL CARE
Specimens of the Art of
V E N T R I L O Q U I S M
Without the aid of Puppets to deceive the eye, or mustachios to conceal the movements of the lips.

Re-creation of handbill

Frederic Maccabe, on the other hand, or more accurately without the use of hands, reigned in the 1860s to the 1880s without ever using a talking hand or a dummy. He was quite happy with his amazingly proficient distant voice techniques. One of his advertisements is recreated, on the right.

Maccabe's use of the word puppets was a put-down of the talking hand. His reference to 'Mustachios,' was a sarcastic slur aimed at others whom he thought wore them as a way of concealing poor technique, among them "G.W. Jester — The Man With The Talking Hand," who took great pride in his rather impressive Van Dyke style mustache and beard. When Jester challenged Maccabe to a performing 'duel' to determine who was the better ventriloquist, as though there were really some absolute criteria with which to make a comparison, Maccabe declined, stating that to

win would be a barren victory adding "nothing to my pocket or reputation." He also noted that a skillful ventriloquist created the effect with the least possible movement of his mouth. Feeling certain that the egotistical Jester would be reluctant to comply, Maccabe insisted that, to have a meaningful contest, Jester's prized facial adornment would have to be shaved off! With this classic bit of one-upmanship, he simply took Jester in jest, and the challenge faded away. Because Maccabe's act did not use anything visual, it was difficult to illustrate in promotional material. What he, and others did, was to illustrate the *illusion* as heard/imagined by the audience. As mentioned in a previous chapter, he wrote, "The effect of ventriloquism is a creation of the imagination produced by a deception of the eyes and ears..." Today's parallel would be clear if we compare the differences between radio versus television, and now telephones versus videophones/computers.



James Burns and his talking hand

There really was room for both factions, the Talking Hand supporters and the purist, non-distraction proponents. Some did not use what might have been strictly called a puppet, but created a character nonetheless. A fellow named James Burns used a hanky to create "Squeeking Tommy. Rodney Goldings did not bother with a contest, but simply declared himself as, "The Greatest Living Ventriloquist." Performing throughout the country in the 1880s, his publicity invited the audience to, "Come and laugh as you have never laughed before." In a scene entitled, "Oh, Have I Got A Cold," Goldings would "sneeze," and remove a handkerchief from his pocket. After forming his hand into a face, he'd cover it with the handkerchief. Along the lines of the etching by Hogarth, it was a cross between a talking hand and a puppet; the adorned fist looked like a small doll. Goldings had an animated conversation, about his ailment, with his newly formed friend.

The talking hand was used by street performers to entertain small groups of people who were up close where the small painted face could be easily seen. Professor Hoffman, noted magician, in his 1890 book *Parlor Amusement*, refers to the talking hand as an ancient performance device. Surely Charles E. Griffin saw no conflict and was happy to include everything from the past and present in his 1896 book, *New and sure key to ventriloquism in three lessons, with full directions for imitating all kinds of birds and animals.* ***The wonderful talking hand****, modern ventriloquism, and the distant ventriloquial voice*. [emphasis added]

Charles E. Griffin

While not mentioning the word polyphony, it is clear from "*all kinds of birds and animals"* that some form of polyphony is included as well. With the publication of several books on the subject, and such simple puppets, the public became more aware of the art of vocal deception, and a bit more sophisticated in their understanding of the technique. Now that just about anyone could do a quick flourish with a "wonderful" hand that talks, many early practitioners wanted something new.

In England, performers entertained in the streets or taverns. When the crowds got bigger, music halls, similar to our later vaudeville houses, began to spring up. These held large audiences which made visibility as important as risibility. Bigger, more easily seen characters were needed. Therefore, figures were gradually introduced and, at first, were primarily homespun creations. The talking hand was losing its grip on popularity, while polyphony remained an old standby.

Crude (by our standards) dolls and dummies were used as focal points. Some were merely a head on a stick attached to a stuffed, legless torso, which was anchored on top of a music stand.[11] They were out in the open or used behind draped tables, as if they were standing or sitting there. Some looked poorly carved, or like decapitated gargoyles. As seen in the picture on the previous page, Griffin used them and more of these can be seen in the Gallery of Vintage Vents. Others consisted of a flat face, painted on a board, which had a hinged moving mouth. The part of the board below the face was covered with an overcoat to give the impression it had a body. Under any circumstances, it had to be large enough to be seen at a distance, and therefore finely carved or delicately painted features were superfluous These, usually homemade, dummies were made by trial and error. Because of the distance, and the era, the crude look was overlooked.

Early dummies

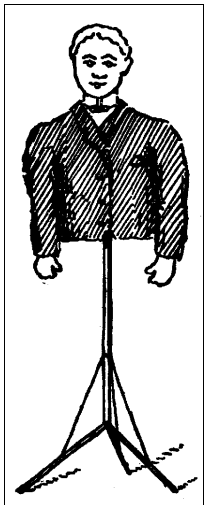


Figure on Stand

Olin, p. 67

Though the new, larger figures attracted attention, unfortunately the art sometimes suffered. As Maccabe had pointed out in his handbill, the puppet was used to distract the observer from the lips of the performer. When used as a 'crutch' in this way, the dummy was relied upon as a substitute for skill and proficiency. Some booklets of that era actually suggest this use. Others even recommend that the 'ventriloquist' turn his head sideways so that the difficult letters may be pronounced out of the side of the mouth! They might have turned sideways, but there was no turning back. Dummies, in one form or another, were here to stay; the artist's lips would have to catch up.

Prof. Brown

Wood was primarily used for the early flat faced dummies, until the 1860s, and the industrial revolution, which brought about changes. As the English music halls continued to flourish, Le Mare and Son, Manchester mannequin makers, saw the future of the

dummy, with some interesting results. As successful mass producers of *papier-mâché* mannequins they began to apply that expertise to the production of different ventriloquial dummies in 1861. As a result of adding mechanical movements to mannequins that became, in effect, ventriloquial dolls, they then enhanced their original static mannequins with movements to produce several types of automata. These mechanical figures were the forerunners of modern animated store-window displays. Things were getting more elaborate when, in 1893 Frank Millis, also of England, invented clever methods to animate figures remotely using squeeze bulbs connected by tubing to pneumatic bladders that expanded to move the features.

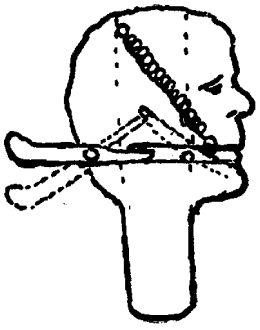
Mass marketing required fast and cheap methods of producing heads which would be much lighter to ship, use and carry than heavy, expensive carved wooden ones.

Papier-mâché was ideally suited for mass marketing. After the skilled sculptor modeled the original in clay, a plaster mold was made from which many copies could be reproduced by less skilled workers. Even the arts were affected by the industrial revolution, which was, in fact, what had decimated the forests, causing a shortage of wood in England. Because it was made of virtually free recycled paper, it made good economic as well as artistic sense, to use *papier-mâché*. Literally, French for "chewed paper," it was, by far, one of the oldest methods, since the hornets' nest was made of chewed wood pulp. It remained the simplest, most easily molded, sturdy, lightweight, safe to use material at hand until, years later, when replaced by newer, but not necessarily safer or better, materials.

While such dummies became more elaborate, more realistic, and more popular, the flippant fist face remained basically the same. Since no one had exclusive rights to it, many performers still included it in their repertoire, with small variations.

In 1895, in response to the growing popularity of ventriloquism in general, and the talking hand in particular, Alfred Le Mare added another item to his line of props; a cloth mitten painted on the side to resemble a human face. The edge of the mitten along the index finger, served as the upper lip, while the thumb, representing the lower jaw, created a moving mouth. With eyes sewn on, this was a puppet, and for a time, it replaced the bare clenched fingers in popularity, especially for those who performed for modest sized crowds.

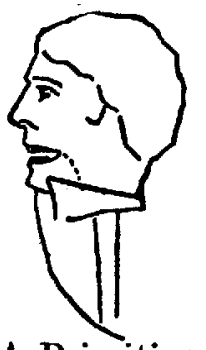
To fill larger theaters and bigger stages, using several dummies on stands, rather than gloves on the hands, gained momentum. With unencumbered hands, you would be able to use several if you wished. For the foreseeable future, the look and mechanics of puppets and dummies would be improved, making them ever more popular. It seemed that the time had finally come for " The Wonderful Talking Hand" to wave good-bye.



Interior Construction of Stand Head

Note the open and closed positions of the lever and mouth. (Olin p. 68)

However, the flippant fist face was such a hardy survivor, that, although it may have been almost gone, it was not forgotten. It would lay quietly, nearly dormant, for many years until an amazing technological marvel helped it to not only regain, but even far surpass, its prior popularity.



A Primitive Head

Note the front pull string, primitive according to Olin, in 1908. (p.66)

The art of figure making grew from early crude homemade dolls, to the more finished look of those made by talented artisans. Performers who wanted custom figures that were not readily available, sought out those who could make them. One artist who was accomplished both at the workbench as well as on the stage, according to Val Andrews, was James Tattersall. He made good use of a "drunk" with an acrobatic and rubber-legged style. But his real "forte" was in truly remarkable automata of his own construction. He supplied the voices for a Chelsea Pensioner and an elderly Lady who appeared to "glide" around the stage in her floor-length gown. He was not only a good ventriloquial entertainer, but possibly one of the most talented and ingenious makers of vent-automata ever, says Mr Andrews. That "gliding around" was probably due to the figure being mounted on a stand with wheels, which was simply concealed under the gown.

Meanwhile, ventriloquial figures made of *papier-mâché* gained followers and started a tradition which was continued by Arthur Quisto (1882-1960) of Kennington Park. His real name was Edwin Simms, but he adopted his name from the word "ventriloQUIST" and added an "o" in the same way that Erich Weiss added an "i" to the name of a French magician he admired, Robert Houdin, to become Houdini.

Quisto made and performed with Punch and Judy puppets for most of his life, except during the first World War, when he served with Lord Birdwood throughout the London Blitz. A very clever man and a superior mechanic, he built "Jerry Fisher," a walking figure, for Coram, [See "The Golden Age"] as well as figures for Arthur Prince. He began his figure making business in the early nineteen hundreds, and over the years introduced novel facial movements. In addition to developing his own pneumatic mechanisms he was a pioneer in the use of electromagnets and solenoids for the remote control of facial features. His medium, *papier-mâché*, had become entrenched as the most commonly used material for figure making in England. Along with his daughter, Quisto eventually moved to Teigmuth, for the rest of his life.

Magic shops such as Davenports, in London, one of the most famous, and Gammage's, a department store and prominent competitor, jumped on the bandwagon and began to sell *papier-mâché* figures from several suppliers, including Le Mare and Son, and Quisto, usually under the store's name. Because of the long connection between magic and ventriloquism, Gammage's advertised in *The Magician Monthly*. An ad is reproduced from January, 1931. [Enlarge to read]

The most prevalent figure, but not the only type, was called the "cheeky boy" character in England. This was later referred to as "the fresh kid" in America. Of course, the figure was not really cheeky, it was just a sculpture. The character, voice, attitude and dialogue were supplied by the performer.

It was rare to find women ventriloquists and/or “cheeky girl” characters. In Edwardian England, it would have been unbecoming for women to behave in that discourteous manner and dainty young ladies were not apt to speak impertinently to anyone, particularly their elders. Yet it was just such rude dialogue which generated laughter and making the audience laugh was the name of the game. Competition among makers increased the quantity and improved the quality. Why pay for an inferior dummy when you could buy a quality one that looks better and lasts longer? However, though they might have been acceptable for casual use, they were still not designed and built well enough to survive the constant use by professionals. It would take an artist/mechanic, and a coincidence, to raise the art of figure making to a completely new level.

Len Insull, (1883-1974) in the picture on the right, was a professional cabinet maker and a magician, a great combination. As “Hinsle, The Magician,” he designed, built, performed with and repaired his own apparatus and props. His wife, Gertie Rees, was also his assistant and performed a clog dance as part of the act. Later, Len Insull's son, also named Len, joined his father in his work, but, tragically, died before him.

A page from a catalogue which featured Insull
Click to enlarge and see all the pages

At one fateful show Hinsle shared the bill with a fellow who complained that his figure kept breaking. Hinsle examined it and then said he could make a better one. The frustrated ventriloquist challenged him to do it. Insull's expertise served him well. Changing his name to Insull, a British phonetic equivalent of Hinsle, he made a vastly improved model which launched him into the figure making business headfirst. Although he built cabinets and worked in wood, he too used the, by now traditional, *papier-mâché* for his figures, rather than carving them.

The talking figure with the moving mouth became a standard prop. Artisans developed many innovative ideas, so that in addition to talking, the character could smile or sneer, depending on whether both lips or just the upper or lower one was manipulated. However, there was one aesthetic drawback to moving jaws. In order for the jaw to move down, there has to be a small open space below, in the neck. The British thought that gap looked unsightly, so they decided to tidy it up a bit. Insull began using a soft piece of flexible chamois leather to conceal the hole as the jaw moved up and down. This worked so well that soon the slots on the side of the mouth became unacceptable. To eliminate them the British pioneered another technique**S**the leather lips and chin. With this method the jaw is stationary and only the lips move, giving the impression of a slightly stuffy manner of speaking. While a figure is talking and interacting, and the observer is laughing, the slots are not as distracting as they are in still photos which are just stared at, so, like makeup for people before a shoot, sometimes publicity photos and promotional material were touched up a bit after the fact, even in the days before digital tinkering made it so easy.

More than perfecting new techniques or adding interesting and ingenious features, Insull gave the figures personalities. His fine, sensitive sculptures were far superior to anything that came before. After retiring from the stage Insull continued his figure-making business. For Peter Brough, (Bruff) who was England's celebrated ventriloquist, and the son of Arthur Brough, Insull created "Archie Andrews." Another of his creations is "Lord Charles" a delightful fellow with a typical "veddy" stiff upper lip, made for Ray Allen. Although most of Insull's dummies gained their reputation in England, one figure did achieve worldwide notoriety — the malevolent "Hugo" who co-starred with Sir Michael Redgrave in *Dead of Night*. Normally mild mannered Hugo was Arthur Brough's partner and was on loan. He now resides in Brough's collection. Insull's enormous talent helped to make him the most popular figure maker at that time. He continued improving techniques and refining the look, until his new approach left the hordes of old-fashioned dummies far behind.

Geoff Felix, of London, is a former puppeteer, and the latest personality in the figure-making field. His credits include manipulating a puppet in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, the popular feature film that created a new standard in animation/human cartoon/movies in 1988. While at Drama College, in 1979, Felix made a ventriloquial head resembling an Insull figure. This gave him the encouragement to continue and eventually work full-time at it. His eclectic approach has elements of all the creative craftsmen of the past, while leaning toward the style of the figure maker who influenced him the most, Len Insull. Terri Rogers is the proud owner of one of his Toby mugs, a beer stein with a face and a moving jaw.

Felix painting a Toby mug.

For some time incorporating a figure in one's performance was mainly limited to England. America itself, "born" a mere six years after von Mengen wrote of his doll with the movable mouth, was a young, struggling country on the move. Entertainment and such innovations as dummies, were not high priorities. About sixty or so years after the first English dummy made its appearance in England, John Rannie, John Wyman, Jr., and more notably Signor (like Señor) Blitz, introduced "the figure" to American audiences. The chapter, "Roots of American Ventriloquism" tells the story. Just after the dreadful Civil War, and fully one hundred years after Von Mengen wrote his letter, history "repeated" itself. Once again mannequin makers entered the field of dummy making, though this time in America. In 1875, W. H. J. (William Henry James) Shaw Co. of Victoria, Missouri, mannequin and window display makers, and builders of "Mechanical Wax Figures," began to supply the trade. Think of wax in the same way that wax museums used it — as an early version of our plastics, which could be sculpted and/or molded, colored, and look lifelike. Their catalog boasted that they were the "Best Ventriloquist Figures In The World. They are a moving breathing marvel of art." These too were *papier-mâché* and were prized possessions then. Looking back, with our standards, we would not consider they are quite as good as they claimed. They had distorted faces, overly long arms, hands, and fingers, which could be dismissed as poor workmanship, but is likely a

representation of Marfan's Syndrome, discussed earlier. In the 1890s Shaw wrote and published, *Ventriloquism*, listing the company as being in St. Louis, Mo. (Missouri).

One popular item was inspired by minstrel shows of the era. At a time when sharp ethnic jokes and heavy dialects poked fun at all groups equally, no one group was singled out, so it was not seen then as clearly racist as it would seem today, when it is obviously politically incorrect. The so-called "laughing Negro" figure had a head hinged to a board at the back of the neck. The lower jaw was stationary, fixed to the neck. When a string, attached to the back of the head, was pulled down, the upper jaw and face would jerk back, opening the mouth very wide. Then, when the string tension was released, the head would fall forward again, from its own weight. Repeated yanks, accompanied by the appropriate sounds, would give the effect of an exaggerated laugh. It was used to punctuate a point or start the audience laughing, in the same way that rim shots, and later canned laughter, and applause signs do today.

Other companies began molding *papier-mâché* figures, which were also rather rudimentary in design. By the end of the nineteenth century, you could buy one dummy for $6.50, or a pair for about $12.00. They offered either a redheaded boy or a redheaded girl, or the popular combination of both; you could even have acquired a Black character, which at that time was called "Negro." The choice of character was yours. Most had glass eyes, but only the mouth moved. If you wanted moving eyes and arms the cost was $10.50 each or $20.00 per pair. Before you lament that you missed out on the ultimate steal, bear in mind that in 1899 if you earned the average salary, it would have been about $3.00 per week! Compare the ratio to today's prices, and you will see, of course, depending on many factors, they are not all that more expensive nowadays. Making the model and molding *papier- mâché* heads, and fitting the mechanics all take time and skill, regardless of the era. That is, for production models. Custom figures take even more time, depending upon uniqueness and complexity.

Paul Stadleman utilized the woodenhead idea and gave away wooden nickels. Windy was carved by Marshall in 1913.

If most of the heads were molded of *papier-mâché*, why is the term "woodenhead" so often used to refer to dummies? It didn't start with a gifted 'Gepetto'— it happened in a most unlikely way. The answer is, it probably started with a theft!

Oddly enough, the person who perhaps had the most influence, in more ways than one, on popularizing the wooden dummy and its "look" was the legendary ventriloquist "The Great Lester." In Chicago for an engagement, young Lester had an unfortunate experience. The suitcase containing his two *papier-mâché* figures was stolen while he was riding on a streetcar.(a horse-drawn vehicle similar to a bus, that ran on tracks) However, he could not afford replacements and thought that he might find someone to carve a head for him, which he probably hoped to pay for over time.

With nowhere to turn, he looked up cherub and wood carvers in books he had borrowed from the library. Since phones were a new phenomenon (which he would

later make use of in his act) and extremely scarce at that time, Lester could not just "let his fingers do the walking." Arriving at the address listed, he found a well-known shop with fabulous carved figures on display, and even in the family-owned bar.

The shop had been established around 1880, back when brothers Louis and Daniel Mack emigrated from Germany. Daniel began a small business in the Chicago area. His son, Theo, operated a woodworking shop with his son Charlie under the name "Theo Mack and Son." They were exceptionally talented and artistic cabinet makers, who also carved cherubs for decorative purposes. Charlie owned the bar attached to the woodworking shop, in which he had many carvings on display.

When he saw all this, Lester must surely have felt elated, but not for long. Much to his chagrin, Charlie Mack told him that he had never made a dummy, nor did he want to.

Though short of funds, Lester was long on talent and enthusiasm, persuasiveness and sheer desperation, traits which surely helped convince a kindly Theodore Mack to help Lester through his dire crisis. Theodore generously gave him some lessons, some scraps of wood to practice on, the use of his carving tools, some space to work in, and perhaps what he needed most of all at this time, encouragement.

To offer a model, he pointed out a carved head hanging on the wall of the shop. Lester instantly recognized it as a replica of one of the Katzenjammer Kids, a precocious member of an extremely popular, and novel, comic strip. (See box) Pressed for time and ideas, he was struck with an inspired publicity-making idea. Lester tried to obtain permission to use that face for his dummy. At first they said yes and then they said no. Lester was forced to rely on his own ingenuity, which was quite creative. He had actually wanted to improve upon the expressionless stare of dummies, but not under such desperate circumstances. His observations revealed that even though the audience laughed at the funny things the dummy supposedly said, they were not particularly interested in looking at it.

U.S Postage Stamp Honors Katzenjammer Kids

The American comics celebrated their 100th birthday on December 12, 1997, with a series of stamps. One of these depicts two boys watching a goat munching on a book. While two adults storm into the room, one boy says to the other with a slight German accent: "A good book should be well digested!" The text on the back of the stamp reads "The Katzenjammer Kids -- Rudolph Dirks (1877-1968). Lester saw some great potential!

Comics pioneer Rudolph Dirks created "The Katzenjammer Kids" in 1897 for the "American Humorist," the famed Sunday supplement of the New York *Journal*. It was inspired in part by a humorous book of maxims and pictures titled *Max Und Moritz*, illustrated by the famous German children's stories of the 1860s and '70s, by the German artist Wilhelm Busch (1832-1908). As the oldest comic strip that is still being produced, the mischievous antics of two famous brats fondly known to many as, "the Katzies," continue to be followed by their countless fans. This longest-running cartoon is distributed by King Features Syndicate to approximately fifty newspapers globally. It was the first genuine comic "strip," meaning several panels, with Dirks inventing or perfecting many of the forms and techniques we take for granted today. Instead of pantomime drawings in one frame with typeset captions [mirroring silent films with title frames] he was one of the first to use sequential panels, regular main characters, speech balloons, and cartoon symbols, such as speed lines. The series features the misadventures of twins Hans and Fritz who team up in defiance of authority. Their name is symbolic of the chaos, mischief, and headaches they cause. "Katzenjammer" means hangover; but literally "cats" yowling. Thus it follows that the name Fritz would soon join our lexicon in the phrase "on the fritz" which has come to mean a malfunction or in a state of disorder. Therefore, it is little wonder that Lester was so attracted to their characteristic comic rebellion and clever innovation at that time, as well as their wide recognition. When he saw the model, he saw a winner. The mischievous boy had had a long tradition in comic art and literature, for example Mark Twain's "Huck Finn" and he felt it would be natural for a ventriloquial figure, as well

Unlike most earlier performers, Lester's absolutely perfect lip control never needed any kind of distraction. However, to provide better contrast with his deadpan look, he had always wanted to work with a figure that actually showed more expression than he did! Except for a few, and in those days rare, mechanical embellishments like moving eyes or eyebrows, the face was expressionless and could not change to fit the dialogue. In fact, most dummy faces appeared to be fairly symmetrical. No matter which way it turned, it looked the same because the left and right sides were almost mirror images of each other, while human faces are not. That was the key he was looking for.

Frank Byron Jr. waits silently at the Vent Haven Museum

Playing his hunch, and plying his tools, he experimented with his own innovative ideas to carve his new partner in an unusual way. He chose to place the eyes in slightly different positions, on slightly different levels. He carved the mouth a little above center on one side and a little below, on the other, giving hints of a smile and a frown. He worked out a method of painting the head with graded shades in various areas of the face and neck. It could have backfired and looked horribly grotesque. Fortunately it did not. It was, however, a comical looking character of no recognizable ancestry, though he gave it a meaningful name, Frank Byron Jr. It was a tribute to Frank Byron, of Byron & Langdom, a well-known contemporary vaudeville team. In a short period of time, Lester had acquired two important friends and business associates — Theodore Mack, his mentor and Frank Byron Jr., his tormentor.

A figure at the Mack's

When Frank sounded happy and turned the cheerful side of his face to the audience, he appeared to smile. When he was unhappy, they saw his sad side. Perhaps there also is often more than one side to what we see, since Lester's problems turned out to be blessings in disguise. The Great Lester, with the deadpan look, together with his stage partner, Frank Byron Jr. with that warm, oddly engaging expression carved into place, rose to the very top of big time vaudeville in a long and illustrious career which is too grand to fit here. [See the chapters, "The Golden Age" and "The Charlie Awards"]

An array of carvings at the Mack shop. They are on a lobster crate.

A bill from Alex Cameron's shop

The Macks eventually produced figures for ventriloquists, including Edgar Bergen. After the Macks had died in 1923, about six months apart, their heirs sold the business to Alex Cameron who had been employed at the Mack shop as a carver for many years. Quietly, in that same year, a small revolution was unfolding that would have a profound impact on ventriloquists. Vladimir Kosma Zworykin

(1889-1982), a Russian-born American physicist, managed to invent the iconoscope. This was the first practical television camera. Though often credited with inventing television, he really did not. But his invention spurred others on to further work in the field. It would be twenty-three more years before it would change the world. Radio was just around the corner. Meanwhile, vaudeville was the major form of mass entertainment other than concerts, theater and sports, and dummies, and their skilled makers, were in very big demand.

Later, during Lester's rise to the top, he befriended another fellow Chicagoan, Frank Marshall, who had lost the use of his legs due to polio, a common muscle disease back then, but which has been all but wiped out today, due to vaccines. Lester saw him create housing models so he gave him some suggestions about woodcarving to help him pass the time while recuperating. The young man was intrigued. Lester then introduced him to Alex Cameron. Cameron later sold out to Marshall, who then became an independent artisan on his way to establishing a name to be remembered. Now the wooden dummy gained prominence from Lester's success on stage, and from Marshall's carving and artistic skills. Marshall worked hard and one can see the evolution of his skills from the "early" to the "later" figures created during ventriloquism's Golden Age. Through extensive study and practice, Frank Marshall raised figure making to new heights and became the most renowned figure carver in the history of the art. At that time most of his figures were custom built; stock items were a rarity. As the Michelangelo of dummy makers, he did all the work himself, except possibly for the wig. He knew his strengths and that was not one of them, so he had them fitted by the best professionals. He later stocked some figures and had a catalog, a practice which many figure makers followed after the Golden Age.

Click here to flip through Frank Marshall's catalog.

RICKIE-TIK
One of Frank Marshal's production figures.

The coveted Marshall figure became a status symbol. Only a working professional would invest in them, so owning one meant you had made the "Big Time." That was a point he made in his advertisement for a figure with the odd name of RICKIE-TIK. One of the chapters in Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book* is Rikki-Tikki-Tavi. Kipling died in 1936, and perhaps there is some connection.

While not a custom figure, it certainly was a "Marshall." He was, indeed, responsible for many of the famous figures America had come to know and love during the middle of this century. Marshall is credited with providing Jerry Mahoney for Paul Winchell, and Danny O'Day for Jimmy Nelson. In the ad he lists many prominent performers, yours truly among them. He later duplicated and modified

Farfel, the dog, for Jimmy. Marshall was an extremely kind man who met and befriended almost all the top-ranking ventriloquists of his day, including such stars as: Frank Gaby, Marshall Montgomery, Walters and Walters and Valentine Vox (Wilfred Moran) who were frequent visitors to his shop.

Frank Marshall had a deep affection for the masters of vocal deception. He also understood the problems of show business and quite often staked the lesser-known until their next job. Knowing about Lester's early struggles, as well as his own, he sometimes extended credit and occasionally did not get paid for his hard work.

Actually, each Marshall figure was much more than just an individual work of art. What separated him from the crowd was his sensitive, atypical view of the ventriloquist/dummy partnership, which he explained to me on one visit to his shop. As we chatted, he rhythmically pounded his chisel with a mallet as chips flew off in all directions. He proudly told me he tried to incorporate into each dummy the personal spirit and characteristics of the vent for whom it was being created. Kidding, I inquired, "If that's the case, how come all your figures look alike?" Without missing a beat, he answered, "Because all ventriloquists look alike."

I was joking about all his dummies looking alike, but there really is a signature look to his figures. His distinctive style can be seen in underlying similarities. Therefore, from time to time, some of us did alter his masterpieces, though most of us never denied their origin or the name of their creator. To customize my Marshall figure, Bruce, I did a bit of plastic surgery, enlarging the ears, building up the cheeks, shaving off a bit here and there, to the point where I got the look I wanted. However, there came a time when papa Marshall didn't recognize his own child.

It happened at the Hilton Hotel in Chicago, where I was appearing in the Ice Show in the early 1960s. Frank spent many evenings with me after the show. My dummies were all about the place, but the one that seemed to draw his eyes was Bruce. Though he stared at him each night, he said nothing. Finally he asked, "Who made the big figure?" Thinking it was just a bluff, and he was putting me on, I went along with the gag. "Oh, that's a Pinxy," giving credit to one of his former competitors. Pinxy had a distinct style too, and this did not fit. Frank, confused, got up from his seat and gave Bruce the once-over; then another, circling. Finally, his curiosity could not be contained and he picked up the figure. Frank's eyes were closed as he moved his hands over the face and felt inside the mouth. He touched his business card which he had glued inside. Suddenly his eyes popped open, he got the gag. He shook his head and burst into laughter, and with a mild cuss said, "Stanley, you dirty *@^%$#^, ***I*** made this figure."

He had made **many** figures, but in the end the wise father recognized his own creation. When Frank Marshall died in 1969, the world of ventriloquism lost an original. To this day, his carved characters are loved and coveted not only by performers, but by lay collectors and connoisseurs of fine ventriloquial figures.

Lester's story helps to answer the question of why the wisecracking character is often called a "woodenhead." It reveals how America came to be the place where three-dimensional carved wood figures changed the look of ventriloquial acts for many years to come. Through the efforts of the Great Lester and his impact on vaudeville, as well as to Theodore Mack's generosity and later, Frank Marshall's hidden talents, a new era of ventriloquism was dawning. The many ventriloquists who followed their lead, some of whom later appeared in movies and on television changed the look of ventriloquism which is no longer associated with 'doll' nor stiff standing mannequin, but rather brings to mind a puppet or character that often sits on the knee of the performer, as featured by Fred Russell and The Great Lester.

These are aptly named "knee figures." Some are designed to be childlike. Others are not. Regardless of their small stature, the personality, look, costume, features, and dialogue of these figures convey the status of the character. If a character looks and sounds like an adult, audiences see it that way and overlook the tendency toward viewing it as a child simply because it is "sitting upon the knee." [See "The Golden Age"] There is a parallel to the diminutive and witty court jester, as well. While vaudeville was an ultra-popular source of entertainment, ventriloquists were in great demand. Many performers used several characters and therefore figure makers were equally in demand, which drew others into the field, where they were also able to make their unique contributions.

Among the beloved artists who worked behind the scenes was Madam Pinxy, a French woman who achieved modest acclaim performing Punch and Judy puppet shows. She and her husband, George (Pinxy) Larsen, were makers of beautiful ventriloquial figures, from 1916 almost until her death, in 1948. In the 30s and 40s she also put out a free, four page newsletter, called *Breezes*, to promote their business as well as provide a way for ventriloquists to keep in touch.. Later, she also edited the *Grapevine News* for the newly formed International Brotherhood of Ventriloquists. Her name was Grace, but she used the title, Madam, without the last "e." When Madam Pinxy died, her husband retired from show business and returned to his prior calling, operating tattoo parlors in the south side of Chicago. He died in 1960.

Madam Pinxy worked with her husband George" Pinxy"' Larsen

Over the years ventriloquists have attempted to be different and, to keep up with them, so have the dummy makers. Finis (Fine-us) Robinson, and his wife Annamay, originally of Waterloo Iowa, then Zephyr Hills, Florida, is also a custom figure maker, as well as a collector and provider of all things ventriloquial. He had a genuinely unique, creative, modular approach to building a dummy. He had large boards upon which were mounted an assortment of facial features. It might be compared to a menu from which you selected the ingredients of a face. One section offered a choice of a dozen noses; long, short, wide, thin and weird ones. Other sections held assorted eyes, ears and chins. You

Glenn (L) and George (R) McElroy

could design, if not actually make, your own figure. In the same way that the police assemble a composite picture of a suspect, you would have a composite companion. Bill Anderson offers a do-it-yourself dummy kit which provides a roughed-out head and you do the fine work, paint it and install the mechanics. You will surely discover why it costs so much and takes so long for figure makers to produce a custom figure, while having fun too. Though these are clever and useful ideas, they are not suitable for every situation and most figures, by Finis himself as well as others, were not created from cookie cutter patterns. Many artisans received intriguing assignments. The McElroy brothers were one such especially talented pair. Both were master machinists, but each had a proficiency. Brother George (right) primarily designed and modeled in clay, after which, he made the final head. Glenn (left) planned, built and installed the complex mechanisms. This well respected dynamic dummy-making duo collaborated on elaborate custom figures for the above-average vaudeville ventriloquist as well as for such celebrities as Rudy Vallee, the legendary crooner, who occasionally performed as a ventriloquist and who was most influential in launching Edgar Bergen's career.

Rudy Vallee and his McElroy friends

Jocko will make faces at you. He is manipulated by Berger in this first ever silent movie of Vent Haven made by the author.

The McElroy brothers received an exciting, challenging, and unusual order from W. S. Berger, the founder of Vent Haven. Berger was not a performer, but a true lover and avid collector of all things ventriloquial. He gave me several personal tours and on one of them I made a silent film which of course included many figures. Among them was Jocko, an unusual, and unusually complicated fellow. In 1937, Berger had commissioned the McElroy brothers to make Jocko the Monkey for his own pleasure, and of course, the pleasure of those who saw him. The monkey was revolutionary, capable of many marvelous movements. Made of Plastic Wood, leather and rabbit fur, it was crafted with fine detail, right down to footprints on the soles of its feet. The operating mechanism inside, on the headstick, resembled the keys of an antique manual typewriter. For example, press a particular lever and the eyes closed, winked or rolled, another made the nose twitch, still another made the ears wiggle. One even made the tongue stick out (you can see it if you look closely at the clip) — a far cry from Mengen's primitive nutcracker puppet.

Berger with Skinny as "Snozzle Durante"

Berger, delighted with the results, dressed as an organ grinder, and played a hurdy-gurdy with Jocko perched on top. They happily entertained Berger's friends and business associates at private parties.

Another interesting assignment went to Glenn Cargyle of California. He was commissioned to make the twin dummies, Terrence and Clarence, (and their stand-ins) for the 1954 comedy spy movie, *Knock on Wood*. In a style similar to that pioneered by Frank Marshall, they were made to resemble the star of the film, versatile comedy actor Danny Kaye (born David Kaminsky).

This points up the special relationship between ventriloquist and figure. It is more than a mere partnership. Every performer invests his figure with its own distinctive personality and voice. As Frank Marshall put it, each figure embodied the personal spirit of the performer for whom it had been created. It's just not the same when manipulated by a stranger. No matter how he looks, Charlie McCarthy without Bergen, just isn't Charlie McCarthy anymore. The unique qualities, created and brought to life by Bergen, would be missing. Yes, there is more to the dummy than just its appearance, but there was one that was startling. Roy Douglas, a recognized figure maker in his own right, had an idea — that two heads are better than one. So he and John Carroll put their two heads together to design just such a dummy, which John Carroll built. Aside from those obvious clichés, we don't really know their dialogue.

John Carroll

Roy Douglas and the two-headed figure made by John Carroll

Yet, there is the other side of the coin: success is not solely dependent upon the "look" of the figure, either. Dialogue and presentation are essential. Though custom figures were a sign of professionalism, they were also expensive. To overcome this problem, some ingenious performers chose to use comical economical alternatives.

In the 1940s, at the height of Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy's popularity, a toy manufacturer produced a child's version of a ventriloquial dummy. It was named "Willie Talk"; a play on "will he talk?" In complete contrast to the custom figures, it was mass produced and sold for three to six dollars.

Two professional ventriloquists amazed their peers by using these toy dummies, and parlaying them into a successful career. Bob Evans and his "Jerry O'Leary" made it big, with a special routine as a singing duo. Ricky Layne modified one of these toy dolls just a bit, to create "Velvel," the dummy with the Jewish accent. Layne appeared thirty-nine times, a considerable number, on the famous *Ed Sullivan TV Show*. Although anybody could buy the doll, not just anyone could "make it" with a toy. It took professionals to produce acts that would repeatedly intrigue Ed Sullivan and his huge and hugely loyal audience. [See "...To TV"]

Then, of course, there were ideas so old, they were new — or seemed like it. Through the miracle of modern technological wizardry, television gave millions of people a view that was even more intimate than you could ever get even in a front row seat. The character's size and visibility were no longer a problem. In a rising wave of popularity, the hibernating "Talking Hand" now reawakened to talk once again and was greeted by the applause of countless other hands in many lands.

Even though they were virtually available to anyone, those simple and long-standing favorites, the talking hand and the talking glove, grabbed modern audiences. In the hands of, or rather *on* the hands of, true professionals, they are most closely associated with Señor Wences and Jay Marshall, from their numerous appearances on that magic box — TV. The perennial, portable favorite of times past, the ancestor of all talking puppets and figures, would now be seen by more people in one night, than the sum of all the people who ever did it, saw it, or even read about it, in all the years of its previous history. [See "...To TV"]

The descendants of the talking hand and later "nutcracker doll" have come a long way. Over the years, innovative and creative designers have made and/or modified dummies, puppets and novelties that talk. Figures can be realistic or fanciful. These include talking, walking sticks or canes somewhat resembling the jester's *marotte*, which are simply a carved head atop a stick which had a moving mouth and a trigger control on the back or further down the shaft. There are small heads that pop out of a pocket, controlled by a rubber squeeze bulb and tubing which are concealed under the wearer's jacket. A soldier, Freddie Woods, created pins that were worn on a jacket, with a pull string to activate the mouth. (See: "Arti-facts") Talking Toby jugs, which get their name from Toby Philpot,[12] and mugs have also been a popular item. There are talking portraits, drawings, shoes and more.

Speaking of shoes, there is always the desire to be one step ahead of the competition, which brings us to walking figures. Though Coram is credited with creating the first walking figure, through the years many claimed to be the originator. Several appear to have accomplished the same feat. Among these were John Cooper, Trovollo, Professor Davis, Lieutenant Walter Cole, W. H. Clement, and probably others.. In his column in the *Grapevine News*, Sept/Oct 1949, Roy Douglas says, "Bill Holliday [a prominent Black Ventriloquist] is working around his wonderful Dancing Dummy, Jo Jo." [*sic*] Drawing upon ingenuity and imagination, the dedicated artists kept experimenting with their 'dolls,' to make them more realistic.

In the late 1960s two figure makers teamed up as ESSANCEE ENTERPRISES. The "S" was Paul Stadelman an' the "C" was Jack Coats. [whose name has been misspelled over the years, by articles and in advertisements for his figures, so we set the record straight.] Several figures had standard movements, and closing eyes/winkers plus a handshake extending arm. Lower level models sold with each of the above items extra. Glass eyes and a life-like finish they called "Skin-Glo," were featured.

Jack Coats

Cover of ESSANCEE brochure

Figure makers have always kept up with technology. Now in use by various craftspeople are diverse materials including *papier-mâché*, wood, leather, cloth, latex rubber, foam rubber, composites, fiberglass, plastics and even interesting combinations. Complicated operating mechanisms incorporating pneumatic tubes, threads, wires, rods, cables, state-of-the-art remote controls or "animatronics" have all been utilized along the way, starting from the early, pre-vaudeville days with thread, wire, and pneumatic tubes. Movements have been addded and improved. **Click to see an odd patent for the ball and socket neck, in 1975!**

Back in the early 1950s, when Dr. Lichi was made for me, it was the first figure that allowed the performer, alone, to operate it by radio control, making the mouth open and close and the head turn, while providing the voice via ventriloquism.

David Strassman employs robotics, animatronics and a computer to activate his insolent partner, Chuck Wood. Strassman does most of the show in the traditional way, but let's Chuck take over for a part of it — actually Chuck sends Strassman away and seems to be completely independent of him. Strassman still does the voice, however. The computer is also used for all the light and music cues.

Another complicated, and expensive, character would be Ronn Lucas's famous teenage dragon, Scorch. Ronn maintains the tradition of moving the mouth and head himself, while doing the ventriloquism live. The eyes, ears and eyebrows are controlled remotely by complex servo mechanisms manipulated via radio control, by other puppeteers or computer, as are many puppets and costumed characters seen today. Both Chuck and Scorch are Jocko and Lichi taken to new heights.

From the court jester to the Great Lester, ventriloquists today owe a large debt to all those creative, dedicated people of past generations. A toast especially to: (Leroy) Jack Coats, John Turner, John Shirley, Yost, Quisto, James Tattersall, Louis Grannatt, Clyde W. Powers, Frank Millis, Len Insull, Cecil Gough, Fred Russell, Lemuel Williams, Glenn Gargyle, Roy Douglas, Martin Stevens, Foy E. Brown, John Carrol, Charlie Fowler, Fred Maher, Madam (Grace) Pinxy, George (Pinxy) Larsen, Brian Hamilton, Howard Olson, all the unknown people of the past and of course, Baron Von Mengen, the Mack Brothers, Frank Marshall, and the McElroy Brothers. They forged new directions.

Howard Olson, like many others, was a figure maker and performer

Fred Maher, Founder of Maher Ventriloquist Studios, with Skinny

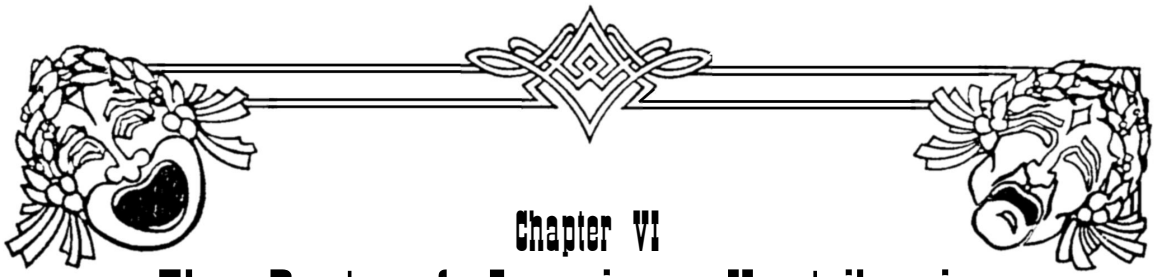
In times past, in America, the chisel and mallet were handed down to the next generation of figure carvers. In England, the formula and techniques for using *papier-mâché* and leather lips were handed down. Times change, and those traditions may no longer hold, as many figure makers and puppet providers utilize a variety of methods and materials, while some have remained closer to tradition. One custom remains, and that is to make a contribution to the art. Let us also express our admiration and appreciation to these fine artisans and companies as well: Finis

Robinson, Mary Ann Taylor, Pady Blackwood, Kristin Peterson, Chuck Jackson, Bill Anderson, Bill Boley, Geoff Felix, Brant Gilmer, Jerry Layne, Animax Designs, Joel Leder, Rick Price, Conrad Hartz, Dale & Liz VonSeggen, Larry LaFontsee, Frank Butler, Len James, Chris Rund, Dennis Alwood, Verna Finley, Clinton Detweiler, Craig Lovik, K. S. Gode, Mastercraft Puppets, Steve Axtell, Capt. Dick Wightman, and of course, Michael Brose, John Arvites, Alan Semok, Ray Guyll, and Tim Selberg, who could surely write their own book on figure makers. A toast to them and to the many unknown craftspeople whose hands talk with tools and materials as well as to our future venerated builders. One and all, they have been, and continue to be, important figures in our field, contributing their own chapters to the story of ventriloquism, and each surely deserves a chapter of their own, for they are carving their niche and shaping the future of our art. The innovations to come will surely speak for themselves.

Okay, ventriloquial innovations don't really speak for themselves, someone talks for them. But, then, who came up with the "innovative" idea of using ventriloquism in America?

Perhaps this is a justly proud and prolific figure maker.
(unlabeled, faded photo, enhanced)

As an American icon, mention must be made of an unusual mass produced Mickey Mouse ventriloquist figure. It was put out by the Horsman Doll Co. in 1973. The professional word figure, rather than doll or toy, applies because it is surprisingly well made. This figure seems to be based on a strange 1975 patent [# 3,900,991] which was assigned to the company [click to see the claims for yourself!]. The patent description fits this figure, including claims for the ball and socket neck, front "trigger" for the mouth, and a rubber band and hook on the end of the headstick! What is strange is that it patents those three items! The figure has a molded plastic body with some sculpting for shape, and a sit-flat bottom, sitting on your arm at about 20" tall, plus dangling cloth tube legs. [Also patented!] Its molded and painted plastic ("resin" in the patent) head has eyes painted on, but the patent shows an eye mechanism. The neck and body have a molded ball and socket joint which assists in giving smooth manipulation by a headstick, [which the patent calls a "handle"] with a front trigger placed for use by the index finger. The mouth movement is easy and smooth, and the return action is powered by one or more rubber bands. To change them you remove some screws and then just close it back up. The patent describes and claims the headstick with a molded hook on the bottom and a rubber band that attaches to a hook in the body, to hold it all in place. While they "did it up right" and there is no doubt that young and old alike had fun with this fellow, it seems that the patent office might have been a bit lax.



Chapter VI

The Roots of American Ventriloquism

The story of ventriloquism in America is a long, rich and varied one which is hardly known today, even among most ventriloquists. Through the years, however, people have posed the question of "Who was the first American ventriloquist?" The surprising answer — A Native American Indian!

John Mulholland, was a noted society magician, author, editor and respected historian of magic and allied arts. He wrote in his book, *Quicker Than The Eye...*:

> The Indians, at times, used ventriloquism and would apparently have conversations with spirits all about the room. They frequently claimed, also, that a spirit lived in their stomachs, and they would go into trances and talk, although it was always explained that it was the spirit who really did the talking.[13]

American Indians believed that the elements and all of nature's creations, animate and inanimate, were endowed with spirits. That was one reason they valued their environment and treated it so respectfully. Thus, the claim of their medicine men and medicine women, which is what their people called them, that the spirits did the talking seemed plausible. It is possible that the practitioners had long convinced themselves that their powers were genuine and god-given, or simply passed down by family tradition because that was the way it is supposed to be. This is not to deny any part of their beliefs, but their ceremonies have been studied and some aspects are attributed to ventriloquism. While the name of the first person who used this technique is not known, many of the rituals and skills associated with it are.[14] Robert F. Spencer, professor of anthropology at the University of Minnesota, describes the various sounds the audience heard, in *The Native Americans*. Because many of the rituals had to do with herbs, roots, and curing sickness, their own people, who depended upon them, used the term "medicine man," rather than the more encompassing term *shaman*, which was what the white observers called them.

> A skilled ventriloquist, the *shaman* punctuates his singing with the voices of his spirit helpers and the growl of the brown bear or the howl of the wolf....[15]

Ventriloquism appears to be an intrinsic part of our American heritage, which the Indians cultivated. When the early European colonists arrived, the Indians shared their knowledge of agriculture, and simple root and herbal cures with them, some of which are being rediscovered today. They had an advanced culture which allowed them to survive the harsh winters here. The Indians used magic and spirit voices, which were forbidden by the "White Man's" Bible and appeared to the colonists as a form of witchcraft. The settlers, Puritans, Pilgrims and Protestants of various denominations, believed in one God, and would not have been receptive to what looked to them as the polytheistic pagan practices of the Indians, a contributing factor in misunderstandings which led to the mistreatment of the Native Americans. The cultures were so different, it is a wonder that they ever got along. Work and religion were the main focus of the new arrivals. The things that provided a change of pace from work were sermons, Bible reading, church suppers and festivities where the focus was the singing of psalms.

In view of this, the field of entertainment evolved slowly. It took almost one hundred years before ventriloquism was used purely for amusement. The performers were basically immigrants from England and Europe. They were primarily one-man shows seeking, in a new world, the success which they had not achieved in their homelands. Their various specialty acts were supplemented with other skills, which included: magic, musical numbers, tight rope and slack rope walking, juggling, fire-eating, and the most popular of all — ventriloquism.

In ways similar to that used by the Indians, most of the early ventriloquists performed polyphony, featuring bird and animal imitations, but without spiritual overtones. As there were no places set aside solely for entertainment, performances were held where people would gather, such as the street, in taverns, inns and city halls, and later, at fairs, and Masonic auditoriums. Much later something called "dime museums," (for the price of admission) and, ultimately, theaters, would be built.

The early American performers were a source of inspiration and encouragement to many young people throughout the years. Intrigued by the phenomenon of ventriloquism, each generation of performers inspired someone to follow in their footsteps, who then became a prominent ventriloquial entertainer, raised the art and, in turn, became a star to emulate. This unbroken chain weaves in and out of the lives of common folk and presidents alike, both in war and peace. Performers today owe their interest and no small measure of their accomplishments to these same forebears.

Several ventriloquists performed during America's early years. While those contemporaries exaggerated the quality and variety of their offerings, they did present the art as entertainment. Some did mimicry, making voices supposedly come from different objects, with comedy repartee of variable merit. Many were coarse, others outright vulgar, but a few were well-mannered.

The best documented and therefore most significant event in American ventriloquial history was the birth of the first vocal manipulator we know of, who was not of Indian parentage, Richard Potter (1783 - 1835). Potter, who would

become known as the "Celebrated Ventriloquist," capitalized on the rumors about him throughout his career. His mother, Dinah Swain, was a black African slave in the household of Sir Charles Henry Frankland, tax collector of the port of Boston and a descendant of Oliver Cromwell, the British General.

According to one rumor, Sir Charles was Potter's father. Another had it that Benjamin Franklin was his rightful sire. The confusion stemmed from the similarity between the surnames, Frankland and Franklin. Both stories were false. Birth records show that Richard Potter's father was George Stimpson, a farmhand.[16]

Richard Potter received a meager education, attending the Hopkinton, Massachusetts village school until 1793 when his formal schooling ended at the age of ten. He was sent off to sea, apprenticed as a cabin boy to a Captain Skinner of Roxbury, Massachusetts, a friend of Sir Charles's family. It was a rugged, unpleasant experience for the youngster, who was treated harshly and eventually set adrift near the English shore, where he landed a short time later.

In England, young Richard Potter was fascinated by the sophisticated world around him. Though many wonders impressed this young farm boy, it was seeing his first circus performance that was most memorable. He was overwhelmed by the colorful costumes, the camaraderie, and the odd creatures. Most of all, never having seen anything theatrical, he was entranced by the entertainers.

Even though life for Potter was already difficult, the hard life of a traveling showman couldn't be worse. Like countless young men before and after him, he joined the circus, where he did menial work at first. However, his charm and determination helped him win the friendship of the performers and they taught him many of their unique skills.

Five years after entering show business, Richard Potter, then age fifteen, returned to America as a privileged member of the first circus his young homeland had ever seen. Potter, perfecting his professional skills along the way, traveled with the circus only until 1801, when he was fortunate to meet, and acquire as a mentor, the astounding magician and ventriloquist John Rannie one of two brothers using the stage name "Mr. Rannie."[17]

Impressed with the young man's skills, curiosity and enthusiasm, Rannie accepted Potter, now eighteen, as his apprentice. Together they toured the sparsely populated areas where hard working people craved diversions.

People had always been attracted by the mystique of foreign acts, rather than home-grown talent. In 1801, Rannie billed himself as "The European Ventriloquist," a title that lent an aura of glamour in the unsophisticated United States. In the early 1800s John Rannie was known from Maine to the West Indies, and as far west as New Orleans. His brother, James did not continue touring America, returning instead to

"This singular power of ventriloquism will be displayed by Mr. Rannie without deception or confederacy in a manner beyond the power of words to describe. We have no account on any <u>real</u> ventriloquist but, since the woman of Endor. This extraordinary power of speaking from the belly is altogether a natural gift and impossible to be acquired by anyone." *[sic]*

From a Rannie handbill
Note the reference to the "woman of Endor"
and the claim that it is a gift.

England. John remained the chief presenter of magic and ventriloquism here, until 1811 when he retired.

Even though all performers used exaggerated promotional material, John Rannie was especially proficient at puffery. A town in which he was scheduled to appear would be papered with "broadsides," large, elaborate, posters, which enumerated the many ways in which the audience would be entertained, receiving value far exceeding the ticket price. One such broadside proclaimed:

> He commands a voice to answer him from closets, presses, from under chairs, tables, floor and ceiling of the room, likewise from ladies' and gentlemen's pockets.

"He will cause a voice to converse from the pockets of his audience, or from any object present at a distance of 50 feet. His ventriloquial powers gave rise to the alarm which took place in the city of Edinboro's Market, which caused the owners of the fish stalls to desert their stands, where he disposed to give a specimen of his extraordinary natural powers in the public fish market persuaded that none of the proprietors would remain at their stand if not previously apprised of his talent."

From a Rannie handbill

The "presses" were clothes presses, smooth boards hinged at one end and used to keep clothing neat. They are not as common today, but are still in use. John Rannie's outrageous claims boggled the imagination. There was not the slightest trace of modesty in his quaint advertising, samples of which appear in the sidebars. He emphasized his ventriloquial abilities, often billing himself as a ventriloquist first and a magician second. In the first box, his reference to "the woman of Endor," was the Witch of Endor, discussed in an earlier chapter, "World's Oldest Con Game," and points out that, in fact, she was really just a ventriloquist.

The year 1811 was significant in Potter's life. His benefactor, John Rannie, retired and presented all his equipment to his protégé. Potter, now 28, also was accepted into the Masons on November 13, 1811, and became a member of Lodge 459. Over the years, he would rise through the ranks and earn his degrees, eventually becoming a Distinguished Member, obviously a title with much honor in the organization. He even used a Masonic emblem on one of his broadsides.[18] The Masons were a secret society and that added to the mystique.

Potter had grown to be an attractive, slim young man with a light brown complexion and black hair. Though he was obviously a mulatto and spoke perfect English with a slight American accent, he successfully passed himself off as a Hindu, recently arrived from India.

However, people were confused about his mixed-blood ancestry. They circulated rumors that he was a Penobscot Indian, a Northeastern tribe, which made the assumption plausible. Richard Potter, the instinctive showman, neither denied nor confirmed the story. This exotic confusion of his heritage, combined with his winning charm, easygoing manner and superb skills, accelerated his professional growth. The entertainment business was growing too. Promoters were erecting

buildings designed specifically for various forms of diversions, among them, were to be museums, of the type for which Barnum would later be known.

Richard Potter, by now a seasoned professional, was always in full command of the stage. A November 1811 performance at the Columbia Museum in Boston was well received. His program had an exciting freshness.

He eagerly emulated John Rannie's proficiency and flair with publicity. One of his broadsides, though stilted by today's standards, promised:

> Mr. Potter will display his wonderful but laborious powers of ventriloquism. One of his principal comicalities consisting of a humorous dissertation on noses and will give imitations of wearers of said noses. Sleight of hand and laborious speaking from the stomach.

Notice what might appear to be a redundancy; for those who didn't know what ventriloquism meant, he included "laborious speaking from the stomach" to cover all bases, and perpetuate the myth. Other notices proclaimed: "Ventriloquial and philosophical amusements." He also used two-part phrases, a common style then, "An evening's brush to sweep away care; or, a medley to please," which could be timeless. On the other hand, "Laugh and grow fat," would be unlikely to attract the health and diet-conscious, "be thin" obsessed audiences of today!

Richard Potter traveled throughout the Eastern states to great acclaim. His handbills boasted that he offered "100 varied mystifications." At about that time, the study of noses in particular and the body in general was considered a "science," called physiognomy. While not ventriloquism, it does show what kind of entertainment was popular. Supposedly based on fact, physiognomy posed the theory that the shape of a person's nose determined personality, character, and disposition. "People with strongly curved noses laugh often at others. They, like the rhinoceros of the proverb, are amused by the snouts of others."[19] Richard Potter cashed in on these trends with a routine of "philosophical amusements" referred to in his broadside as "a comical dissertation on noses," in which he described and impersonated the owners of assorted noses of all sizes and shapes. It has been a common belief that this was some kind of ethnic spoof. However, in a personal letter to this author, Professor John Hodgson, of Princeton University, mentioned some discoveries he made while doing research for his own book that shed light on Potter's act, and was kind enough to let me include them here.

> The "dissertation on noses" was a not uncommon performance piece in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The version used by an eighteenth century popular performer, James Soias Dodd, was printed in the 1760's. In his "Critical Dissertation on Noses" ("As they are now performing at the Great Room, Exeter Exchange"), Dodd would indeed put on models of various noses as he talked about them; but all his noses indicated character traits, and

none had anything much to do with ethnicity, nor was any dialect involved. Thus he exhibited and discoursed on the "hook-nose," which "denotes superstition and gossiping"; the "turning-up nose," denoting "envy, spleen, and ill-nature"; the "ruby nose" (heavy drinking); the "sharp nose with a red tip" ("a sure sign of a scold"); etc. (eight different noses in all). Dodd's work was published (second edition) in 1767. Much of Potter's act tended to be pretty derivative of eighteenth century performances; it's pretty likely that this part of it was, too.

In the early 1800s the American "belly talkers" rarely used what is considered today an integral part of ventriloquism, the dummy. Once again, Professor Hodgson's research turned up some startling new information.

> Finally, you'll want to know that, despite the contrary assertions of the various authorities, Rannie was in fact at least occasionally using a dummy for portions of his ventriloquial act in the early 1800's — although he never once mentioned it in any of his advertisements (I've discovered some contemporaneous accounts of the dummy by people who saw Rannie perform). So the figure definitely had come to America; it simply wasn't at all prominent. (Why that should be so is a very interesting question.)

Potter admission ticket. They were sold in advance, collected at the door and reused, due to the high costs of printing. Only a few or so of these survive. Courtesy New Hampshire Historical Society Library.

Very interesting indeed, and quite a revelation in light of the fact that even though he had this novelty, he did what almost everyone else did — polyphony, which remained the primary form of ventriloquial display. It included the old standby renditions of various noises found in nature, but also included sounds found around the home and even those made by musical instruments. While many ventriloquists performed variations of bird calls and animal imitations, Richard Potter's faithful reproductions were described as extraordinary. He was called "the oracle of our young day."[20] This indicates that they were equating the ancient (olden day) oracles with their "modern day" ventriloquist, as one and the same. [See "World's Oldest Con Game."] In addition to making sound imitations, he performed ventriloquial comedy routines, some based on the use of the distant voice, as if someone were on the roof, up the chimney, outside the window. He, and others, would also make plates, vases, clocks, and whatever else was available, talk. Other routines were built around muffled voices, as though someone were talking from inside assorted closets, barrels, crates, and trunks, as advertised in handbills. [See previous sidebars]

These techniques and routines also were the basis for reports of practical jokes - some true and some apocryphal— repeated by all the ventriloquists of the era. The John Rannie story of the pigs in the trunk, in the next sidebar, is one example. While that

anecdote seems possible, many of these stories are just that - stories. Although the fictional Valentine Vox novel wasn't published until 1840, five years after Potter's death, and in England, not America, the old-time mystique and misunderstandings about ventriloquism were often perpetrated and perpetuated by the ventriloquists' promotional materials. Even today, given the right circumstances, it is still possible to fool people with ventriloquial pranks. As a ventriloquist, and as an observer of other ventriloquists in action offstage, I believe, though with some skepticism, one such situation which, because of the factor of surprise, sounds feasible.

In 1803, another of Rannie's pretentious playbills blatantly boasted:

"In order to convey an idea of the nature of ventriloquism to those who are not in the knowledge of such being in existence, MR. RANNIE begs leave to state the following facts; He perceived a couple of servants carrying trunks into a hotel, and immediately threw his ventriloquin voice into them as if they were filled with pigs. The landlord, who stood by, supposing the trunks to contain this species of live stocks, instantly demanded where they were going. They replied they wanted to put them in the bedroom, at which he got into a rage, and ordered them out of his house adding, he "kept no room for pigs." They insisted there were no pigs in the trunks. "Liars!", exclaimed he, "Begone! I have not yet lost my hearing." Immediately the gentleman made his appearance, and the trunks being open, to their utter astonishment, nothing of the pigs were to be seen. MR. RANNIE seeing the joke carried far enough, instantly explained to the landlord the cause of it; at which he was satisfied to permit the trunks to be carried to the chambers.

Richard Potter's celebrity status usually eased the problem of his racial identity. Because of his color, Potter, who was known as "Black Potter," was once denied admittance to a gala affair at the Sachem (pronounced saytchem - it means "Chief") Inn, an elite establishment. The exact circumstances are sketchy. As he was about to leave, a guest recognized Potter and informed the host that he was "Potter, the celebrated artist." Delighted to have such a noted personage in their party, the host invited him to join the assembled guests and seated him at the head of the table, an excellent location for what he was planning to do. The dinner was particularly lavish. Resting upon a platter, and perfectly placed a short distance from Potter, was a roast suckling pig with all the trimmings. The entertainer apparently had no inclination to forgive or forget the initial snub. The evening proceeded uneventfully until it was time to carve the main course. As it was sliced, the pig suddenly emitted squeals of pain. The gullible guests gasped in horror. Potter had exacted his revenge.

Richard Potter's fame did not necessarily guarantee an easy lifestyle. For twenty years, Potter performed up and down the East Coast, from Quebec to the South, where he understandably encountered much prejudice. He was once refused a room in Mobile, Alabama. Nevertheless, in a twelve-day engagement there, he reportedly earned the incredible sum of about $4,800. That amounted to approximately $400 for several performances daily. He filled a nail keg with the money, mostly in coin. Justifiably fearful of being robbed, he left town in the middle of the night, going in the opposite direction from his announced destination. As a successful performer, he was used to earning large sums of money, and was soon able to fulfill a lifelong wish; owning a piece of land for his old age. He purchased a tract of 175 acres in New Hampshire. Thus, in 1814, Potter and his wife, Sally (nee Harris), a former singer, settled in Andover, New Hampshire, where they raised cattle and pigs, and grew vegetables. In an area where folks lived in

common cabins, he designed a majestic mansion. Potter's unique domain, an estate with a manor house, was, appropriately, named "Fanciful." Because the entire upper floor was used to present shows, the regal residence allowed Richard Potter, the gentleman farmer, to remain the consummate showman. His personal life, however, was far from idyllic. Details are very sketchy. Prof. Hodgson has supplied the best information available to date:

His simple tombstone reads, "In memory of Richard Potter the Celebrated Ventriloquist who died Sept. 20, 1835, aged 52 years."

> Their first child, Henry M. Potter, as born ca. 1809. He died in childhood, on 10/5/1816, in Andover, NH. Eastman's town history of Andover indicates that Henry was run over by a farm wagon; Eastman's source was probably old local lore, for no written records have been found to confirm it, but it's quite credible and the only story we have. There's no mention of the death in the local records, such as they are, but there is a dated grave marker in the oldest town cemetery. The second son, Richard Jr., was born ca. 1814, and outlived his father, but disappears from all records after the early 1840's. And a daughter, Anganet ("Jean"), was born ca. early 1815, was impregnated by a neighboring tavern keeper ca. 1829, died in March 1831.

Thus two of the Potter's three children died at an extremely young age and Potter's wife became an alcoholic. Even so, Richard and Sally Potter were community-minded and well respected by their neighbors, as well as fellow Masons.

He was a member of The Black Masonic Lodge, which had been organized in Boston, about 1778 or 1779, but had no official Masonic charter. Members called their group African Lodge No. 1. Eventually, the Grand Lodge of England chartered it as African Lodge 459, in 1784 (one year after Potter was born). However, it wasn't until 1787 that the charter reached Boston and Prince Hall, a free Black who owned property in Boston, was instrumental. Forty-three years later, the lodge issued its own declaration of independence. In 1827, three prominent men were elected to accept the charter on behalf of all its members. One of the three was Richard Potter.

Richard Potter died in 1835. His son, Richard Jr., inherited the show, but the elder Potter was a hard act to follow. Unable to fill his father's shoes, the younger Potter left show business.

Potter's life story — son of a slave rises to lofty heights in America - even served as the inspiration for a recent novel, *The Conjurer's Journal*,[21] written by Frances L. Shine and published almost 150 years after Potter's death.

Robert Olson, a writer, historian, and performer was equally impressed with Potter's life. Upon researching Potter's background, in the 1950s, Bob Olson combined his own unique talents and knowledge to develop a one-man show in which he portrayed Richard Potter. Olson was not a ventriloquist, so he faithfully reenacted Potter's magical program, while attired in an accurate reproduction of his costume. He used Potter's patter, in the quaint language of the era, along with authentic antique magical apparatus and routines

of the type with which Potter so successfully kept early American audiences spellbound. Some of those routines, indeed, were the inspiration for what are, today, classics of legerdemain.

Potter was buried on his estate, in front of his home; two years later, Sally was laid to rest beside him. Eventually the graves were moved aside when a railroad was built, but the Potters remain buried near the station, in a small, private graveyard which is a local landmark known as Potter Place. A meritorious Mason and mystifying magician, Potter also was America's first known ventriloquist.

Though America lost a popular performer in 1835, the year also marked the arrival of Signor Antonio Blitz, whom Barnum would later book at his amusement mecca he would call "The American Museum," but that would be in six years. Blitz assumed an aura of mystery by claiming to be Moravian, though he was actually a British subject.

Signor Antonio Blitz and his entourage arrived in Staten Island, New York, aboard the packet ship Columbus, from Liverpool, England.[22] He burst upon the scene with his Scottish wife, two sons, two servants, a future star named "Little Bobbie," and a complete magic show which included 100 canaries. In his handbills, he claimed that these canaries "could do anything that a man could do." He later expanded the birds' number to 500, or perhaps they did that without his help. He was rather impressed with the city.

> New York was at this time a city of great magnitude, and rapidly increasing. The eye could not fail to perceive her unsurpassed geographical advantages, or the mind wonder at the destiny which awaited her. The hurried footsteps of the people, their spirited manner of dealing, and general market traits between the inhabitants of the Olde and New World to me, the paramount object of life appeared to be an emphasis in speed in conversation and action. At meal or bedtime the same characteristic prevailed, and in a brief period I myself became from an European walk Americanized to the *racing proclivities* so popular, and I may observe, necessary for success in this nation. (Blitz, p.112)

This short, plump, bewhiskered man featured comedy rather than mystery. He looked for a large hall, but was disappointed to find few large enough. Thus he gave his premier performance in America in October 1835 at the Masonic Hall on Broadway, in New York City, which was the largest available at the time. Well known for his "Dance of the Six Dinner Plates," a fast-paced plate-spinning routine, so appropriate to a fast moving city, and a man whose very name, blitz, was literally the German word for lightning. He would spin a plate on the end of a long, thin pole and balance the pole on a long table. After quickly starting another plate spinning on another pole, he placed it, too, on the table at a safe distance away, repeating it until six plates were spinning on poles and then, as the first one slowed down, wobbled and swayed, he dashed over to "rev" it up by moving the pole. As he took a bow, the next plate wobbled and he had to race to that one and reactivate it. The audience roared with laughter as he scrambled from end to end, grabbing the poles and trying desperately to keep all his wobbling plates from crashing to the floor.

While not actually ventriloquism, this part of his show is described because we will hear faint echoes of it in another chapter, describing the hilarious act of the inimitable and charming Señor Wences. This prominent performer spins a plate on a long stick and does ventriloquism at the same time.

Like Richard Potter, Antonio Blitz billed himself as a magician-ventriloquist and presented many tricks and mysteries in his performances. Though his ventriloquial scenes were similar to those of his peers, one novelty does set him apart.

Antonio Blitz entertained American audiences with something which had only rarely been witnessed on this continent before. It was a wooden dummy that when spoken to, talked back. Blitz had brought the dummy, "Little Bobbie," along from Europe, though he did not use it at first, thinking it would be just a quick throwaway bit. Yet, this remarkable doll, with its sassy remarks, shortly became and remained Blitz's star attraction. Why he chose the name "Bobbie" is not clear, because a name more easily pronounced ventriloquially would have made more sense. (See box) Frederick Eugene Powell wrote a series in the highly respected magic magazine, *The Sphinx*. Here is what he recalls of a performance of Blitz he enjoyed around 1862, (about twenty-seven years after Blitz first came to America) in his article "Reminiscences of a Magician," June, 1927, p. 136.

When the new Metropolitan Police Force was created in 1829, Sir Robert Peel was home secretary of England. The bobby, or police officer, was named after him, so it was a name that was somewhat novel and yet well known at the time. Though no proof is available, this may explain Blitz's odd choice.

> ...Scenes in Ventriloquism comprising near and distant voices, conversations with a member of the audience who went upon the platform, various imitations of birds, insects and animals, kept the house in constant roars of merriment; especially was this the case when the impromptu assistant was made to sing and to repeat at odd intervals the refrain, Tra, la, a, lah, as though he was immensely pleased with himself and his song. During this act Blitz worked his manikin that he called "Bobbie." This figure was about thirty inches high, having a movable mouth worked by a lever in its body, so that the lips seemed to move in conformity with the spoken words....

With his success, one wonders even more about John Rannie, a man known for puffery, keeping this sensation under wraps. Perhaps Rannie had tried it before America was ready for a talking doll.

Putting the voice into the mouth of a member of the audience on stage, who served as a stand-in for the figure, is still done today. All the volunteer had to do was imitate the doll by opening and closing his mouth, without speaking. These shows were impressive and realistic, especially to naive youngsters. Once, a boy came to Antonio Blitz after the show, seeking his help. The boy's Uncle George was voiceless; the boy asked Blitz to help make him speak again. Antonio Blitz, a religious man, told the child that only God had that divine power.

Once Antonio Blitz's magic prowess was given complete proof — 80 proof, that is. Blitz was a recognized personality in social and political circles. Among these celebrities was Governor (1844-1851) George N. Briggs, of Massachusetts. Briggs was a popular man, known far and wide as a teetotaler and a temperance advocate.

John F. Parker, [Former] State Senator from Massachusetts where Briggs had been governor, wrote:

> In the old days of Massachusetts politics, the pulpit took a hand in electioneering, with the clergy manifesting their preference as distinctly as they could, without calling names. During an exciting contest for the governorship, Father Taylor, well-known seamen's preacher of the period, was very outspoken on the issue of temperance. Thus he wrestled with the Lord in prayer: "O Lord, give us good men to rule over us, pure men who fear Thee, religious men, temperate men, men whom we can trust, men who—Pshaw! O Lord! What's the use of veering, hauling and circumventing, and boxing around the compass — Give us George N. Briggs for governor. Amen!" The prayer was answered.[23]

Which goes to show that Governor Briggs was such a well and widely known temperance advocate that it makes the anecdote told by Blitz that much more powerful, and shows Briggs to be a genial fellow with a fine sense of humor.

Blitz visited him at the statehouse, where the governor introduced him to guests. As Blitz turned to leave, the Governor asked him to favor them with a small magic trick. Blitz asked for the loan of a hat, and the governor reached up and removed his own, offering it to the man of magic. Blitz produced a bottle of liquor, labeled Old Rye. Amid the astonished laughter, the governor, a very good sport, declared, "...bad for my reputation, but brilliant for yours."

At a Blitz performance in Washington, D.C., Senator Henry Clay of Kentucky was in the audience. Clay, a statesman who prided himself on his sense of humor, later approached the ventriloquist with an idea. In his book, Blitz recounts.

> This gentleman was an occasional visitor at my exhibitions. At the close of one, he told me, in a happy and laughing manner, he wished I would come to the senate chamber, and, by the aid of my ventriloquial power, send my voice among his democratic friends, so that they might vote for the measure they had opposed. He said, "It would cause a glorious excitement among the democracy!" (p. 182)

Blitz once visited the internationally acclaimed virtuoso violinist Paganini in Glasgow, Scotland. Upon entering the room where the maestro was staying, Blitz noticed that Paganini was practicing his violin. Blitz made it sound as though a baby were crying inside Paganini's empty violin case. Paganini, completely taken in, did

not understand how this could be. He checked the case and found nothing there. When Blitz revealed the ruse, Paganini grasped his hand and exclaimed, “Bravo, Signor, Bravo.” One might wonder, “Are these anecdotes true?” Modern experiences I and my colleagues have had are comparable with those of that unsophisticated era. Blitz was also a generous man. During the Civil War, from 1861 to 1865, he entertained the troops 132 times, appearing before 62,000 wounded soldiers.[24]

As much as he brought joy to his audiences, Signor Antonio Blitz paid a heavy price for his fame. His name and act became so well known, and he was in such demand, that copycats rode his coattails. They included imitators who claimed to be a Blitz son or a nephew, as well as impostors. In the America of the mid 1800s, it was nearly impossible to verify a person’s true identity. Moreover, unethical theatrical agents and managers didn’t care whether they had the genuine article. They simply profited from Blitz’s reputation.

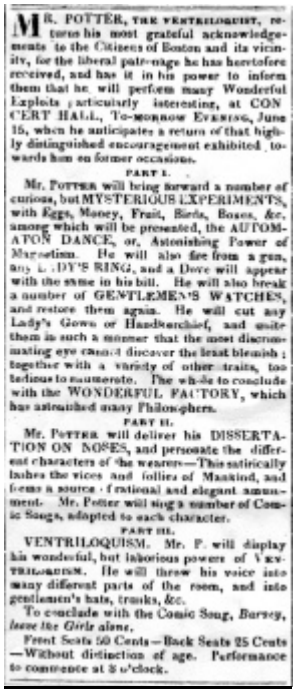
Though Blitz died in Philadelphia in 1877, his remains are buried in Brooklyn, New York, in Cypress Hills Cemetery opposite Machpelah Cemetery, where the famous American magician and escape artist Harry Houdini would be buried, nearly fifty years later, in 1926.

Blitz’s renown survived for years; until 1899, someone, somewhere, was still using the name “Blitz” as a magician-ventriloquist. Among those usurpers were:

Signor Blitz	Signor Blitz, The Wonderful
Signor Blitz, Jr.	Signor Blitz, the Unrivalled
Signor Blitz, the Original	Signor Blitz, the Mysterious
Signor Blitz’s son	Signor Blitz, by Purchase
Signor Blitz, the Great	Signor Blitz, the Great Original

Helping to popularize the wooden dummy in America was the great legacy that the real Signor Antonio Blitz bestowed upon the art.

Come one come all.



MR. POTTER, THE VENTRILOQUIST, returns his most grateful acknowledgements to the Citizens of Boston and its vicinity, for the liberal patronage he has heretofore received, and has it in his power to inform them that he will perform many Wonderful Exploits particularly interesting, at CONCERT HALL, To-MORROW EVENING, June 15, when he anticipates a return of that highly distinguished encouragement exhibited towards him on former occasions.

PART I.

Mr. POTTER will bring forward a number of curious, but MYSTERIOUS EXPERIMENTS, with Eggs, Money, Fruit, Birds, Boxes, &c. among which will be presented, the AUTOMATON DANCE, or, Astonishing Power of Magnetism. He will also fire from a gun, any LADY'S RING, and a Dove will appear with the same in his bill. He will also break a number of GENTLEMEN'S WATCHES, and restore them again. He will cut any Lady's Gown or Handkerchief, and unite them in such a manner that the most discriminating eye cannot discover the least blemish; together with a variety of other traits, too tedious to enumerate. The whole to conclude with the WONDERFUL FACTORY, which has astonished many Philosophers.

PART II.

Mr. POTTER will deliver his DISSERTATION ON NOSES, and personate the different characters of the wearers—This satirically lashes the vices and follies of Mankind, and forms a source of rational and elegant amusement. Mr. Potter will sing a number of Comic Songs, adapted to each character.

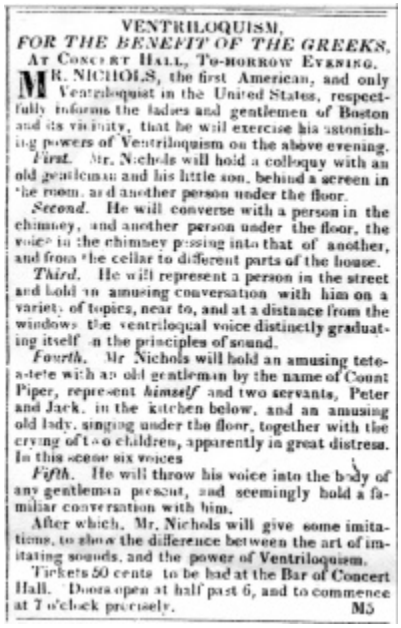
PART III.

VENTRILOQUISM. Mr. P. will display his wonderful, but laborious powers of VENTRILOQUISM. He will throw his voice into many different parts of the room, and into gentlemen's hats, trunks, &c.

To conclude with the Comic Song, *Barney, leave the Girls alone.*

Front Seats 50 Cents—Back Seats 25 Cents—Without distinction of age. Performance to commence at 8 o'clock.

Potter's advertisement
Boston *Courier* 6/14/1825
Courtesy, John Hodgson



VENTRILOQUISM,
FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE GREEKS,
AT CONCERT HALL, To-MORROW EVENING.

MR. NICHOLS, the first American, and only Ventriloquist in the United States, respectfully informs the ladies and gentlemen of Boston and its vicinity, that he will exercise his astonishing powers of Ventriloquism on the above evening.

First. Mr. Nichols will hold a colloquy with an old gentleman and his little son, behind a screen in the room, and another person under the floor.

Second. He will converse with a person in the chimney, and another person under the floor, the voice in the chimney passing into that of another, and from the cellar to different parts of the house.

Third. He will represent a person in the street and hold an amusing conversation with him on a variety of topics, near to, and at a distance from the windows the ventriloqual voice distinctly graduating itself in the principles of sound.

Fourth. Mr Nichols will hold an amusing tete-a-tete with an old gentleman by the name of Count Piper, represent *himself* and two servants, Peter and Jack, in the kitchen below, and an amusing old lady, singing under the floor, together with the crying of two children, apparently in great distress. In this scene six voices

Fifth. He will throw his voice into the body of any gentleman present, and seemingly hold a familiar conversation with him.

After which, Mr. Nichols will give some imitations, to show the difference between the art of imitating sounds, and the power of Ventriloquism.

Tickets 50 cents to be had at the Bar of Concert Hall. Doors open at half past 6, and to commence at 7 o'clock precisely. M5

Nichols advertisement
Boston *Courier* 3/5/1830
Courtesy, John Hodgson

GRAND EXHIBITION.

MR. HARRINGTON,

THE CELEBRATED AMERICAN VENTRILOQUIST, respectfully informs the Ladies and Gentlemen of Keene and vicinity, that he will exercise his astonishing powers of

VENTRILOQUISM
AND
Legerdemain,
together with the
Automaton Band,

At Mr. HATCH'S HALL, on Monday Evening, Jan. 25th, when by his exertions to please, he hopes to receive a share of public patronage.

PART I.

Mr. H. will bring forward a number of curious but mysterious

EXPERIMENTS,

With CARDS, EGGS, MONEY, FRUIT, BALLS, BOXES, &c.

Among them will be presented the

Automaton Dance!!

Shewing the Astonishing powers of Magnetism. Glass Casket or Mysterious Desk, Mysterious Dollars and Deception Ball.

He will also offer any Gentleman present, to load a Pistol with *POWDER* and *BALL*, and discharge the same at him, & he will catch the Ball on the Point of a Sword! To conclude with

GAMES OF TUMOROUS
BALLS,

And many other Recreations not inserted in this Bill.

PART II.

Mr. H. will go through with a variety of pleasing feats of

BALANCING.

PART III.

Mr. H. will go through with his wonderful and laborious powers of

VENTRILOQUISM!

He will hold an amusing conversation with an old man in the Chimney, together persons under the floor and a third person in another part of the room as a test. He will conclude the Ventriloquism by imitating Birds, &c. The whole to conclude with the

Automaton Band

Playing a number of the most Popular Airs with great correctness—appearing to Sing and none of whom they were lately imported in this country and are considered one of the greatest

PIECES OF MECHANISM

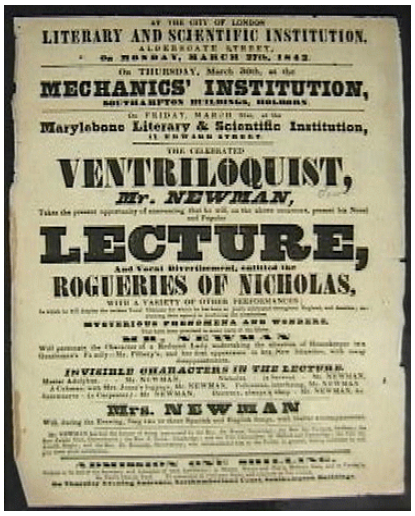
ever offered to the Public view.

Tickets 25 cents, Children half price, to be had at the bar of Mr. HATCH, on the day and Evening of Performance. Doors open at 6 1/2 o'clock; Performance to commence at 7.

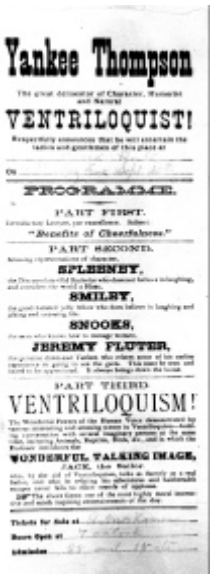
Harrington's advertisement in
The *Cheshire County Republican and Farmer's Museum*
Keene, NH 1/20/1830
Courtesy, John Hodgson

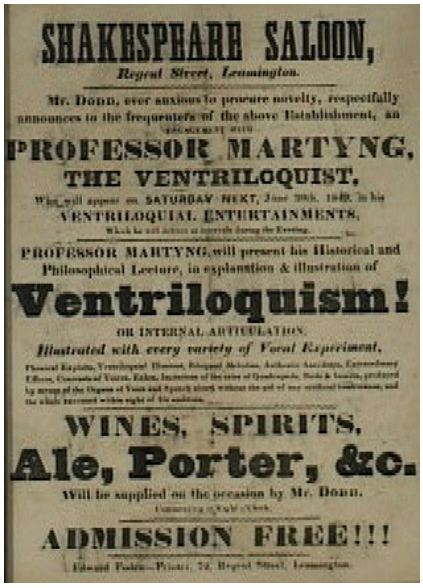
Nichols claims to be the "first and only" but he must surely have known that Potter was first, and if not that, at least that he was not the *only* ventriloquist. He played the same town and advertised in the same paper only five years *after* Potter, and surely followed a similar circuit, which apparently did not stop him from claiming to be "first." Prof. Hodgson's book will surely shed more light on this. Who is first with what, and where, is a perennial problem in the creative arts, even today. New information comes to light to settle the issue until research turns up even more.

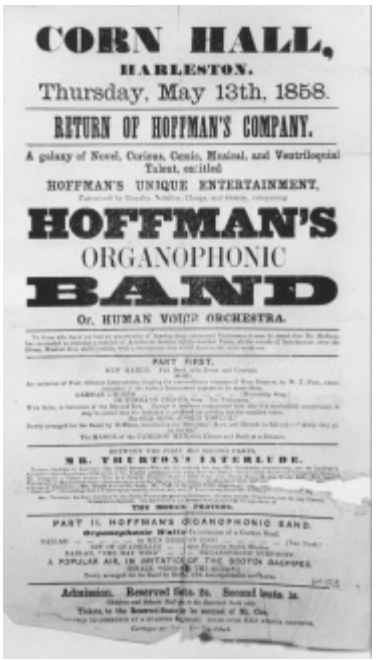
More entertainers came on the scene with variations and old standbys.

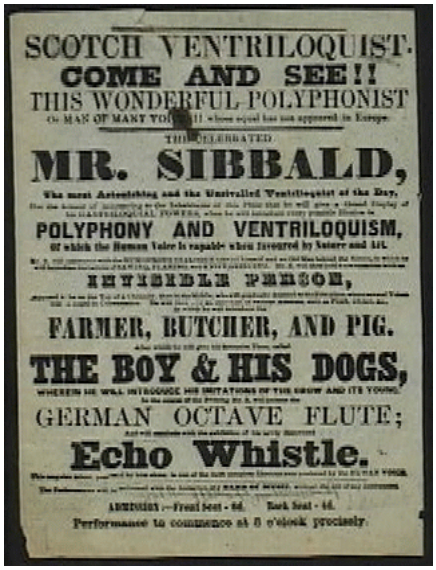

AT THE CITY OF LONDON
LITERARY AND SCIENTIFIC INSTITUTION,
ALDERSGATE STREET,
On MONDAY, MARCH 28th, 1842.
On THURSDAY, March 30th, at the
MECHANICS' INSTITUTION,
SOUTHAMPTON BUILDINGS, HOLBORN.
On FRIDAY, MARCH 31st, at the
Marylebone Literary & Scientific Institution,
11 EDWARD STREET.
THE CELEBRATED
VENTRILOQUIST,
Mr. NEWMAN,
LECTURE,
And Vocal Divertisement, entitled the
ROGUERIES OF NICHOLAS,
WITH A VARIETY OF OTHER PERFORMANCES
MYSTERIOUS PHENOMENA AND WONDERS.
MR. NEWMAN
INVISIBLE CHARACTERS IN THE LECTURE.
Mrs. NEWMAN

Admit One.


Yankee Thompson
VENTRILOQUIST!
PROGRAMME.
PART FIRST.
"Benefits of Cheerfulness."
PART SECOND.
SPLENDY.
SMILBY,
SNOOKS,
JEREMY FLUTER,
PART THIRD
VENTRILOQUISM!
WONDERFUL TALKING IMAGE,


SHAKESPEARE SALOON,
Regent Street, Leamington.
Mr. Donn, ever anxious to procure novelty, respectfully announces to the frequenters of the above Establishment, an
ENGAGEMENT WITH
PROFESSOR MARTYNG,
THE VENTRILOQUIST,
Who will appear on SATURDAY NEXT, June 20th, 1840, in his
VENTRILOQUIAL ENTERTAINMENTS,
PROFESSOR MARTYNG, will present his Historical and Philosophical Lecture, in explanation & illustration of
Ventriloquism!
OR INTERNAL ARTICULATION,
Illustrated with every variety of Vocal Experiment,
WINES, SPIRITS,
Ale, Porter, &c.
Will be supplied on the occasion by Mr. Donn.
ADMISSION FREE!!!

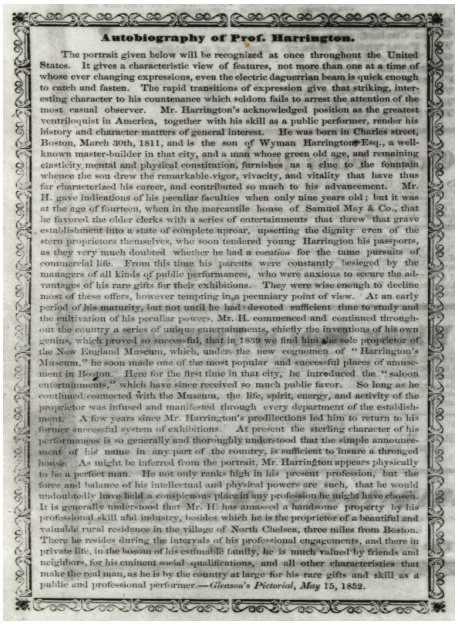

CORN HALL,
HARLESTON.
Thursday, May 13th, 1858.
RETURN OF HOFFMAN'S COMPANY.
A galaxy of Novel, Curious, Comic, Musical, and Ventriloquial Talent, entitled
HOFFMAN'S UNIQUE ENTERTAINMENT,
HOFFMAN'S
ORGANOPHONIC
BAND
Or, HUMAN VOICE ORCHESTRA.
PART FIRST.
MR. THERTON'S INTERLUDE.
PART II. HOFFMAN'S ORGANOPHONIC BAND.
Organophonic Waltz
A POPULAR AIR, IN IMITATION OF THE SCOTCH BAGPIPES
Admission. Reserved Seats 2s. Second Seats 1s.


SCOTCH VENTRILOQUIST.
COME AND SEE!!
THIS WONDERFUL POLYPHONIST
THE CELEBRATED
MR. SIBBALD,
The most Astonishing and the Unrivalled Ventriloquist of the Day,
POLYPHONY AND VENTRILOQUISM,
INVISIBLE PERSON,
FARMER, BUTCHER, AND PIG.
THE BOY & HIS DOGS,
GERMAN OCTAVE FLUTE;
Echo Whistle.
ADMISSION:—Front Seat - 6d. Back Seat - 4d.
Performance to commence at 8 o'clock precisely.

Entertainment in America during the late 1800s expanded along with the country and took many forms. Large cities had their museums, theaters and exhibition halls, where minstrel shows were seen and vaudeville was taking shape. Small towns were visited by traveling entertainers, where the main street became the setting for the show. A brightly decorated, horse-drawn wagon stopped near the town square, and the driver dismounted. One side of the wagon folded down to become a stage. The performer emerged with a ventriloquial dummy and engaged the gathering crowd in comic banter. As in television today, the entertainment was simply used to gather and hold a crowd for the commercial pitch. This was a traveling "medicine show."

After getting underway, the show would take a quick break so that the "doctor" could hawk his "secret Indian remedy." This consisted of a haphazard combination of ingredients having little medicinal value, usually containing a heavy dose of alcohol. The entertainment was similar to a sideshow and ranged from magicians and sword swallowers to jugglers, balancing acts and ventriloquists. To make sure the crowd stayed, they always saved the best stunt to follow the big pitch. Even though Antonio Blitz had toured with the talking dummy, and others were using them, few people had ever seen this amazing novelty. Ventriloquists with dummies became a feature of some medicine shows, because they were sure-fire magnets to attract and hold a crowd. However, there were differences of opinion regarding its value, and like the talking hand, not every performer incorporated the dummy into their act.

One performer who did not use one was Jonathan Harrington (1809-1881) the next American-born ventriloquist after Potter to achieve renown. Harrington's long career started one night in 1821, when his parents took him to the Washington Gardens Amphitheatre in Boston. There he saw a popular and talented French artist, "Mr. Charles," a ventriloquist and magician whose full billing was: "Professor of Mechanical Sciences to the King of Prussia." That night, the excited twelve-year-old Jonathan amazed his parents with a very close imitation of "Mr. Charles, the French Ventriloquist." They enthusiastically applauded their son's impersonation, realizing that he had been bitten by the "vent bug."

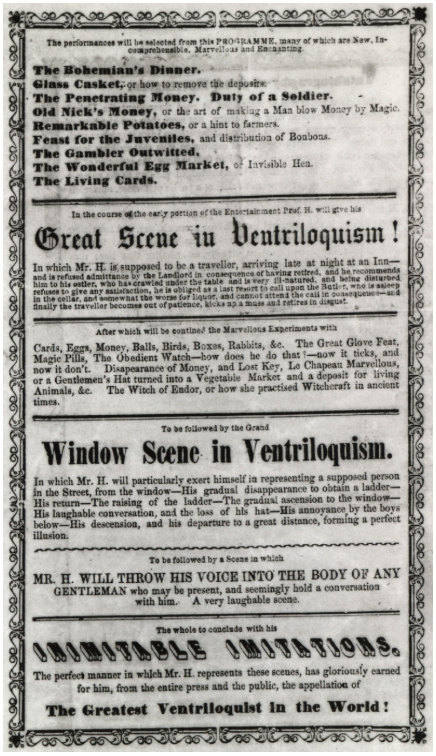


Autobiography of Prof. Harrington.

The portrait given below will be recognized at once throughout the United States. It gives a characteristic view of features, not more than one at a time of whose ever changing expressions, even the electric daguerrian beam is quick enough to catch and fasten. The rapid transitions of expression give that striking, interesting character to his countenance which seldom fails to arrest the attention of the most casual observer. Mr. Harrington's acknowledged position as the greatest ventriloquist in America, together with his skill as a public performer, render his history and character matters of general interest. He was born in Charles street, Boston, March 20th, 1811, and is the son of Wyman Harrington, Esq., a well-known master-builder in that city, and a man whose green old age, and remaining elasticity mental and physical constitution, furnishes us a clue to the fountain whence the son drew the remarkable vigor, vivacity, and vitality that have thus far characterized his career, and contributed so much to his advancement. Mr. H. gave indications of his peculiar faculties when only nine years old; but it was at the age of fourteen, when in the mercantile house of Samuel May & Co., that he favored the older clerks with a series of entertainments that threw that grave establishment into a state of complete uproar, upsetting the dignity even of the stern proprietors themselves, who soon tendered young Harrington his passports, as they very much doubted whether he had a *vocation* for the tame pursuits of commercial life. From this time his parents were constantly besieged by the managers of all kinds of public performances, who were anxious to secure the advantages of his rare gifts for their exhibitions. They were wise enough to decline most of these offers, however tempting in a pecuniary point of view. At an early period of his maturity, but not until he had devoted sufficient time to study and the cultivation of his peculiar powers, Mr. H. commenced and continued throughout the country a series of unique entertainments, chiefly the inventions of his own genius, which proved so successful, that in 1850 we find him sole proprietor of the New England Museum, which, under the new cognomen of "Harrington's Museum," he soon made one of the most popular and successful places of amusement in Boston. Here for the first time in that city, he introduced the "saloon entertainments," which have since received so much public favor. So long as he continued connected with the Museum, the life, spirit, energy, and activity of the proprietor was infused and manifested through every department of the establishment. A few years since Mr. Harrington's predilections led him to return to his former successful system of exhibitions. At present the sterling character of his performances is so generally and thoroughly understood that the simple announcement of his name in any part of the country, is sufficient to insure a thronged house. As might be inferred from the portrait, Mr. Harrington appears physically to be a perfect man. He not only ranks high in his present profession, but the force and balance of his intellectual and physical powers are such, that he would undoubtedly have held a conspicuous place in any profession he might have chosen. It is generally understood that Mr. H. has amassed a handsome property by his professional skill and industry, besides which he is the proprietor of a beautiful and valuable rural residence in the village of North Chelsea, three miles from Boston. There he resides during the intervals of his professional engagements, and there in private life, in the bosom of his estimable family, he is much valued by friends and neighbors, for his eminent social qualifications, and all other characteristics that make the real man, as he is by the country at large for his rare gifts and skill as a public and professional performer.—*Gleason's Pictorial, May* 15, 1852.

Encouraged by his parents, Jonathan Harrington spent all his spare time practicing his newly acquired hobby, while he also developed an interest in the allied art of magic. By the

time he was seventeen he was proficient enough to perform at Boston's Castle Street Hall, in 1826. He was an instant hit. Word of young Harrington's success spread quickly, which resulted in several offers for other professional engagements.


The performances will be selected from this PROGRAMME, many of which are New, Incomprehensible, Marvellous and Enchanting.

The Bohemian's Dinner.
Glass Casket, or how to remove the deposite.
The Penetrating Money. Duty of a Soldier.
Old Nick's Money, or the art of making a Man blow Money by Magic.
Remarkable Potatoes, or a hint to farmers.
Feast for the Juveniles, and distribution of Bonbons.
The Gambler Outwitted.
The Wonderful Egg Market, or Invisible Hen.
The Living Cards.

In the course of the early portion of the Entertainment Prof. H. will give his

Great Scene in Ventriloquism!

In which Mr. H. is supposed to be a traveller, arriving late at night at an Inn—and is refused admittance by the Landlord in consequence of having retired, and he recommends him to his ostler, who has crawled under the table and is very ill-natured, and being disturbed refuses to give any satisfaction, he is obliged as a last resort to call upon the Butler, who is asleep in the cellar, and somewhat the worse for liquor, and cannot attend the call in consequence—and finally the traveller becomes out of patience, kicks up a muss and retires in disgust.

After which will be continued the Marvellous Experiments with Cards, Eggs, Money, Balls, Birds, Boxes, Rabbits, &c. The Great Glove Feat, Magic Pills, The Obedient Watch—how does he do that!—now it ticks, and now it don't. Disappearance of Money, and Lost Key, Le Chapeau Marvellous, or a Gentlemen's Hat turned into a Vegetable Market and a deposit for living Animals, &c. The Witch of Endor, or how she practised Witchcraft in ancient times.

To be followed by the Grand

Window Scene in Ventriloquism.

In which Mr. H. will particularly exert himself in representing a supposed person in the Street, from the window—His gradual disappearance to obtain a ladder—His return—The raising of the ladder—The gradual ascension to the window—His laughable conversation, and the loss of his hat—His annoyance by the boys below—His descension, and his departure to a great distance, forming a perfect illusion.

To be followed by a Scene in which

MR. H. WILL THROW HIS VOICE INTO THE BODY OF ANY GENTLEMAN who may be present, and seemingly hold a conversation with him. A very laughable scene.

The whole to conclude with his

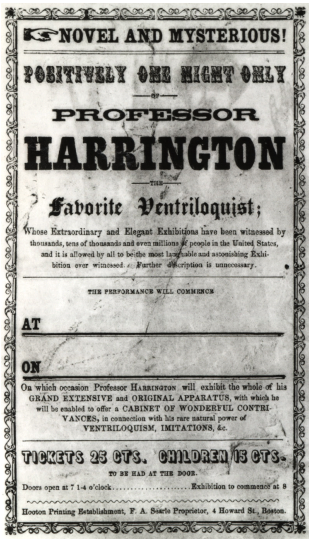
INIMITABLE IMITATIONS.

The perfect manner in which Mr. H. represents these scenes, has gloriously earned for him, from the entire press and the public, the appellation of

The Greatest Ventriloquist in the World!

Although he accepted the job to please his parents, he found ways of bringing his talents into hardware sales. From his impromptu stage behind the counter, he would pull outrageous ventriloquial pranks on unsuspecting customers and fellow workers. He created the sound of an invisible saw cutting wood. He caused a pair of hinges to appear magically, and squeak. That there is no mention of him opening and closing them to make them speak, is rather peculiar, unless squeak is a typographical error for speak. A clear case of minding your p's and q's. Or perhaps an editor knew what hinges do and do not do. Or Harrington just did the polyphony and left it at that, though he did make other items talk. Of course, when he made a purchased keg of nails protest, "I don't weigh a full ten pounds," you can just imagine the surprised reaction of the carpenter, and the proprietor who heard the impropriety.

After two years of these impertinent improvisations, it became apparent to his parents, his boss, and himself — Jonathan Harrington was going nowhere with hardware. His knack at making things appear to talk was his future. At the age of nineteen, in 1828, he embarked on his ventriloquial venture, which would turn out to be a career.


NOVEL AND MYSTERIOUS!

POSITIVELY ONE NIGHT ONLY

—OF—

PROFESSOR

HARRINGTON

—THE—

Favorite Ventriloquist;

Whose Extraordinary and Elegant Exhibitions have been witnessed by thousands, tens of thousands and even millions of people in the United States, and it is allowed by all to be the most laughable and astonishing Exhibition ever witnessed. Further description is unnecessary.

THE PERFORMANCE WILL COMMENCE

AT

ON

On which occasion Professor HARRINGTON will exhibit the whole of his GRAND EXTENSIVE and ORIGINAL APPARATUS, with which he will be enabled to offer a CABINET OF WONDERFUL CONTRIVANCES, in connection with his rare natural power of VENTRILOQUISM, IMITATIONS, &c.

TICKETS 25 CTS. CHILDREN 15 CTS.

TO BE HAD AT THE DOOR.

Doors open at 7 1-4 o'clock.....Exhibition to commence at 8

Boston Printing Establishment, P. A. Searle Proprietor, 4 Howard St., Boston.

Aware of Richard Potter's reputation as "the first American-born ventriloquist," Harrington billed himself as the country's "second born" ventriloquist. On the other hand, a Mr. Nichols appeared at the Boston Coffee House utilizing five voices in his performance, and claimed to be not only America's first, but it's only ventriloquist. Also, The Boston *Advertiser*, in 1827, reported that, "Mr. Nichols's art is not acquired, it is the gift of nature. His performances need to be seen to be appreciated, ahead of all predecessors, and his

accomplishments have puzzled the most eminent men of science." Like the claims of Rannie, these assertions of being a natural born ventriloquist with no scientific explanation surely contributed to the public misunderstanding already so prevalent at the time. [See "A Series of Theories"] Though Harrington claimed to be America's second-born ventriloquist, his emphasis was on "born ventriloquist" and, while Nichols also made a similar claim, in 1830, he still claimed to be "the first American, and only Ventriloquist in the United States" even though all three performed contemporaneously as the first American-born ventriloquist, Richard Potter. Modesty was not one of his traits.

Jonathan Harrington enjoyed a long career and became a household name. By continuously performing his masterful mixture of ventriloquism and wholesome humor throughout the Northeast, he built such a good reputation while appearing in so many places, so often and for so long, that he developed a large and loyal following. People he once enthralled as children later brought their own children to see the great man. He even purchased the Boston Museum and changed its name to Harrington's Museum.[25]

It seemed unthinkable that this popular man would ever retire, and indeed he never had the opportunity. While performing in York, Maine, he became ill and returned to his home in Revere, Massachusetts, where he died of pneumonia in May 1881. Had he lived, he would surely have been involved in some aspect of the "clean era" of vaudeville, which began about the year he died.

Another ventriloquist who performed in the early 1800s, traveling in the same circles as Richard Potter and Jonathan Harrington, was the charming and diplomatic John Wyman Jr. who appeared at the White House more than any other trouper of his time. With a career spanning thirty years, he gave command performances before several presidents of different political affiliations.[26] He entertained the guests of Martin Van Buren and Millard Fillmore, both fellow New Yorkers, as well as for Abraham Lincoln, of Illinois, who invited Wyman to the White House four times.

Frederick Eugene Powell shares his memories in a series in the highly regarded magic magazine, *The Sphinx*. Here is what he recalls of a performance of Wyman, around 1862 in his "Reminiscences of a Magician," August, 1927, p. 198.

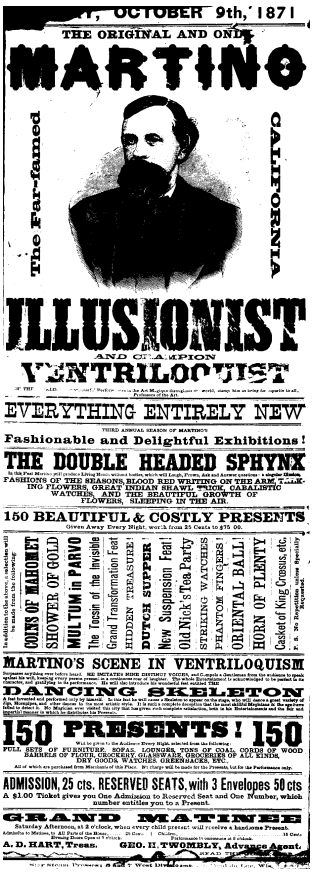
> ...His program consisted of Ventriloquism, Magic and Marionettes, or as Wyman called them "Italia Fantochina." Wyman's tricks were all drawn from the general repertoire then prevailing, and offered no special novelty, although to me many of his tricks were very mysterious. But at that time I was by no means greatly informed in magical lore. He began his performance with an act of Ventriloquism, using a knee figure he called "Tommy." Much of this act was taken up with a colloquial narrative of Wyman's adventures while crossing the territory of the Cherokee Indians during an uprising, when he was escorted by a company of United States Soldiers....

To help draw huge crowds, Wyman customarily raffled off items such as gold watches, family Bibles and silverplate ware, as an added inducement to the ticket-buying public, a practice used by others too and which was called the "gift show."

At the height of John Wyman's fame, a new fad hit the country. So-called mediums were claiming to speak with the dead. The wave of spiritualism, as it was called, began in upstate New York and soon swept over America. John Wyman, an accomplished ventriloquist and magician, was able to see through the fakery. He thus became one of the first to include an exposé of the spiritualists' chicanery in his show. It was not only good box office but a public service. Clearly a clever showman and promoter, John Wyman was considered to be the most affluent American ventriloquist of his day. At the age of sixty-five, in July 1881, John Wyman Jr. died and no one, medium or otherwise, ever claimed to speak with him again.

The earliest known American items on ventriloquism include *Atkinson's Casket*, published in January, 1832, and *Ventriloquism Explained: and Juggler's Tricks Exposed*, published in 1834. Here was the perfect opportunity to promote one's name. Yet, oddly enough, *Ventriloquism Explained*... was issued anonymously. At that time, the word "juggler" was a synonym for magician, and still can be found in use in that sense in Great Britain. While attempting to explain that there was nothing supernatural about magic, thus going against the popular Puritan beliefs, the book was, by inference, demystifying "witches." Even so, it basically echoed the sentiment of the New England Puritan attitude toward work. It suggested that these "itinerant entertainers" quit performing and become gainfully employed. The preface:

> It is hoped and prayed that these pages may exert some feeble influence in compelling wandering jugglers to live by honest labor rather than by infamous deception; and that they may tend in some degree to dispel those mists of superstition, which have long brooded over the nations, but which must soon disappear before the dawn of millennial day.[27]



It's a Monday, in case you were wondering. Unlike today, when most entertainment venues are closed, Monday evening was a common time then.

While the author mentioned deception by ventriloquists, he later explained that he practiced the art himself. Though the book *Ventriloquism Explained*..., is a useful reference, the work, and both the author and the author's motives for anonymity, all remain enigmas.

One author who was not anonymous was a Frenchman. In 1772 Abbè de la Chappelle published the first major exposé of ventriloquism in France. In that same

year, Eugene Leitensdorfer, christened Gerrasio Probasie Santuri, was born in Austria, on October 21, and just about one year before that Martino show in the advertisement, above.

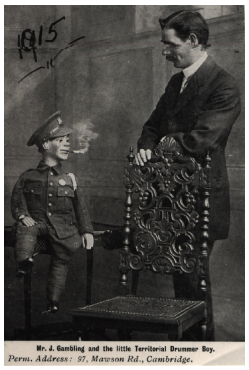
Santuri's parents looked forward to their son becoming a theologian. Instead, he began leading the life of a misadventurer, moving throughout Europe and Africa. In these travels he made many changes, in his name, citizenship, loyalties, and occupations. He was, at different times, prisoner, poisoner, peddler, soldier, sailor, surveyor, friar, farmer, family man. He eventually became a conjurer, and chose the name Eugene Leitensdorfer, later adding ventriloquism to his repertoire. In 1809, he arrived in the United States of America, (when there were nineteen states) and headed west. This made him the first ventriloquist known to have entertained west of the Mississippi River. Eugene Leitensdorfer performed for twenty-four years, and retired the year Potter died, in 1835, at age 63. Leitensdorfer died on March 11, 1849.

New Strand Theatre,
OPEN FOR A SHORT SEASON ONLY!
Splendid intellectual & highly amusing Performances
MONDAY, FEB. 8, 1841,
AND EVERY EVENING DURING THE WEEK.
MR. M. JACOBS
THE JUSTLY CELEBRATED
Royal Ventriloquist,
MODERN MAGICIAN,
AND ENGLISH IMPROVISATORE.
The Stage is filled up with great Splendour;
THE APPARATUS IS COSTLY AND GORGEOUS.
The Vases or Cups of Divination,
THE TRAVELLING CARD. THE BIRD OF PARADISE.
VICTUALLING OFFICE, or CANDLE COOKERY.
Bloodless Mutilation.
FRENCH ROLL AND HANDKERCHIEF. MYSTERIOUS WALNUTS.
Opera Glass and Cards. The Rose and Wedding Ring.
PART II.—OVERTURE.
THE LANDLORD AT HOME;
Or, Gout and Hoarseness versus Family Grievances.
EXTEMPORARY SONG!
ITALIAN IMPROVISATORE!!!

M. Jacobs, calling himself the "Justly Celebrated Royal Ventriloquist," appeared in the Boston area in 1841, the same year that P.T. Barnum opened his American Museum in New York City. In an attempt to change the term "ventriloquist," he pointed out that the root of the word was "ventro," meaning belly but he correctly indicated that the belly is not involved. However, he mistakenly believed that the voice actually came from the chest, with the chest's pectoral muscles doing the work. If you recall Baron Mengen's letter, "...You do need though, a strong chest to maintain the breathing necessary to finish a sentence..." Jacobs proposed that the name of the art be changed to "pectriloquist." This expression never caught on, because Jacobs' theory was incorrect, as well, and thereafter both the "new name" and his own name have been practically forgotten.

John Gambling and the Fluffam Family

John Gambling came from Cambridge, England. He started vent in 1881 as assistant to the then famous Signor Bosco. His figures were made by A. E. LeMare and Sons of Manchester, England. He called them The Merry Fluffam Family. Mr. and Mrs. Fluffam, daughter "Flossie" and son "Adolphus." Typical of minstrel themes of the day, the Negro boy "Sambo" played the bones which were attached to the palms of his hands. Gambling died at age 82 at his home on Milton Road, Cambridge. Three generations of John Gambling's have



Mr. J. Gambling and the little Territorial Drummer Boy.
Perm. Address: 97, Mawson Rd., Cambridge.
John Gambling

John Gambling

held sway on the “Rambling with Gambling” radio talk show since 1925, the longest running show on radio, (not under the same name, but all in the same family) and his grandson can still be heard delighting the public with news and their warm, witty, chitchat etc., on the W.O.R. Radio Broadcasting System in New York City.

Of course it was common at that time to have Negro puppets and minstrel acts. Minstrel shows were an outgrowth of recreations the slaves developed for their own amusement. The most common written records of the era reflected what entertainment was available to, and attended by, free white people. While most slaves were not allowed to be educated, there were some who did learn to read and write and kept diaries and other writing which have shed light on what slavery was really like, during the early 1800s. Needing diversions from their drudgery and unable to go anywhere for it, they entertained themselves. They would imitate each other, and, in private, mimic their white masters. They told stories, sang songs and invented dances. Whites who were trusted discovered this form of entertainment and developed their own acts around it. Comedian Thomas Dartmouth Rice initiated the blackface minstrel act. It evolved to the pre-Civil War minstrel show which consisted exclusively of white men who, by applying burnt cork, turned their faces black to portray Negroes. Though whites copied and parodied southern Negroes, authentic Blacks were prohibited from performing in minstrel shows. Thus, an entertainment initially by Blacks for Blacks became an exclusive Whites-only diversion. The minstrel show, a popular amusement, appeared in the 1840s and lasted more than one hundred years. Considered one of the most uniquely American forms of show business ever, it was the forerunner of vaudeville and burlesque. Though not thought of as “good theater” by the well-to-do, it was a favorite with the masses, who had a limited budget and less refined tastes.

Curmudgeonly Ambrose Bierce put this short play on words in his sardonic 1911 classic *The Devil's Dictionary*. Using the then popular Minstrel motif, the word End is illustrated in only two ways; first, by relative location and the second ‘death,’ as in the poem..

END
n. The position farthest removed on either hand from the Interlocutor.

The man was perishing apace
Who played the tambourine;
The seal of death was on his face --
'Twas pallid, for 'twas clean.

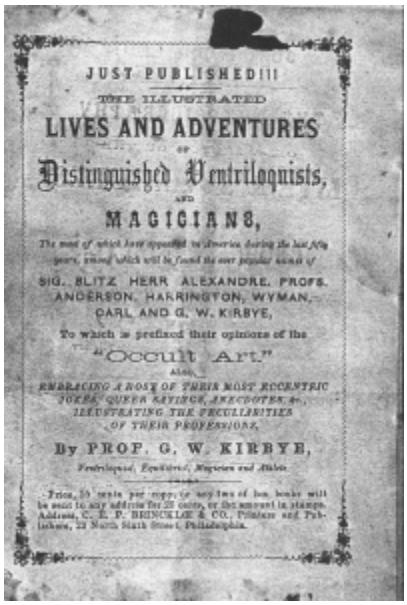
"This is the end," the sick man said
In faint and failing tones.
A moment later he was dead,
And Tambourine was Bones.

Tinley Roquot

Originally, minstrel shows had no set script. The productions were a potpourri of assorted songs, skills and skits. The artists involved created a unified production, with established pieces. There were several variations, though one recognizable form eventually developed and endured. It featured an ensemble of performers whose black faces were highlighted by exaggerated bright white lips and outlined eyes. They also wore similar colorful, formal dress costumes, including top hats and white gloves. Carrying tambourines and singing a happy, up-tempo song, these “minstrels” paraded on stage, in front of a row of chairs. At either end were two special players, logically known as the “end men.” The one who featured the tambourine was called “Tambo,” and the other, who played rhythm sticks, which were actual bones or just wooden sticks named for them, was called “Mr. Bones.”

In 1939, Bergen was still in tune with the times, with Charlie made up for the minstrel show scene in *You Can't Cheat an Honest Man*

At stage center stood a token "white," the "straight man," who was known as "Mr. Interlocutor," a particularly large word for low-class comedy. When he called out, "Gentlemen, be seated," the company did so, accompanied by shaking tambourines. As indicated by his name, it also was Mr. Interlocutor's job to ask his end men questions, usually inane, to set up the jokes. They would reply with comic punch lines and puns. The humor was based on the comical contrast between the well-spoken, officious white man, a foil who asked ridiculous questions, and the smart-aleck, lowbrow end men, countering with clever comebacks, accompanied by the shaking tambourine "rim shot." The banter caused the audiences, motley crowds of hard working, uneducated laborers, to laugh uproariously, which is how the minstrel show became so widespread. Popular songs were presented in almost every show. Stephen Foster, the composer, was a young minstrel and wrote *Swanee River*, *Old Black Joe*, *Old Folks at Home*, *My Old Kentucky Home,* and many other songs, for minstrel shows. These remained popular into the 1950s. The company was made up of entertainment specialists of all kinds, and these novelty acts, such as a whistler, specialty banjo player and tap dancer, were introduced by "Mr. Interlocutor." Each performance was a showstopper. The artists made the most of their ten minute spots, and, despite their talent, their lasting impression of the misconceptions and negative stereotypes of Blacks which formed the basis of the minstrel show, continued for another hundred years. Jokes and joke books of the time were politically incorrect by today's standards and made fun of every ethnic and religious persuasion. Ventriloquial acts followed a similar pattern of banter and crude jokes, which has, like all comedy, sometimes carried over to the present. It contributed to the poor reputation the art has endured in some theatrical circles.


JUST PUBLISHED!!!

THE ILLUSTRATED

LIVES AND ADVENTURES

OF

Distinguished Ventriloquists,

AND

MAGICIANS,

SIG. BLITZ HERR ALEXANDRE, PROFS. ANDERSON, HARRINGTON, WYMAN, CARL AND G. W. KIRBYE,

To which is prefixed their opinions of the

"Occult Art."

Also,

EMBRACING A HOST OF THEIR MOST ECCENTRIC JOKES, QUEER SAYINGS, ANECDOTES, &c. ILLUSTRATING THE PECULIARITIES OF THEIR PROFESSIONS,

By PROF. G. W. KIRBYE,

Ventriloquist, Eccentric, Magician and Mimic

Price, 50 cents per copy; or any two of his books will be sent to any address for 75 cents, or the amount in stamps. Address, C. E. P. BRINCKLE & CO., Printers and Publishers, 22 North Sixth Street, Philadelphia.

Advertisement inside Prof. Kirbye's book.

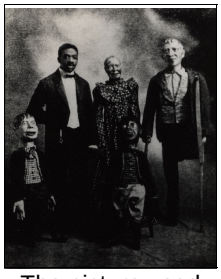
Minstrel shows changed at the end of the Civil War. These shows which originally excluded Blacks, now slowly allowed them into their ranks. At about this time, white performers left minstrel shows and developed a variety program called vaudeville, which was similar to the shows called "Variety" in England. These performances consisted of full shows that ran from an hour to two hours or more. Though not relying on parodies of Blacks, vaudeville had the same motive as minstrel shows: to combine several brief novelty acts that would enlarge the show and widen its appeal.

One of the most acclaimed performers on the minstrel show circuit was John Walcott Cooper. Born in 1873, of African American descent, a scant seven years after the Civil War, and four years before Señor Blitz passed on. John Cooper was educated at Professor Dorsey's Institute in Brooklyn, New York. His parents died when he was young, and he was forced to work at odd jobs. Though small for his age, he became an exercise boy at the nearby Sheepshead Bay Racetrack, cooling off the horses by walking them around the track after a workout.

One day a hired hand, seeing this little boy at work, thought he would have some fun by making John Cooper's horse appear to talk. The prankster had it seemingly exclaim, "Hey, I'm tired of exercisin'!"

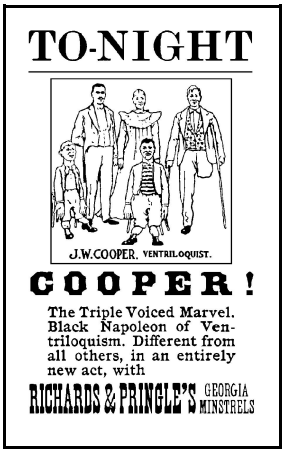
Young Cooper stood paralyzed, stunned by the stunt, his eyes popping out of his head. A talking horse smacked of the supernatural. The prankster relished the reaction. After a few moments, he felt sorry about teasing the kid and explained what he had done, demonstrating the trick for him. It was the first time the youngster had ever heard of the word "ventriloquism" and what it meant. Cooper laughed, genuinely amused and amazed by the hoax. He found out about performers and the exciting industry called show business. He wanted to learn to "throw his voice," too, and began dreaming of a career.

John Cooper was bright and had a good singing voice, along with a natural flair for the stage. In 1886, thirteen-year-old Cooper joined "The Southern Jubilee Singers" and traveled with the vocal group for four years. As they toured the East Coast, from the mid-Atlantic states to Canada, John Cooper used his spare time to study other acts. After having been intrigued by the performances of Harry Bryant and A. O. Duncan, young Cooper took up ventriloquism as a hobby, around the 1895-1896 season, in much the same way that Richard Potter had been inspired by John Rannie, nearly one hundred years earlier. However, one main difference was that, thanks to Wyman and Señor Blitz, American ventriloquists were now using "dummies." Cooper learned his craft, built his first figures, perfected his ventriloquial skills — essentially, "paying his dues." All his preparation was rewarded. He gave his first professional show in 1897, being presented as "Prince Madagascar." Note that he, too, used the public's fascination with the foreign, as part of his act. With this debut as a ventriloquist, his dream of starring in a professional show came true.



The picture used for the cut in the ad on the right

By the 1900-1901 season, John Cooper was signed on by the Richards and Pringles Georgia Minstrels, a widely known group. Around 1903 he was known as "The Black Napoleon of Ventriloquism," using four figures which bantered amiably with each other. Made by W. H. J. Shaw, the prominent figure-maker of the day, they included two sassy children, one of


TO-NIGHT
J.W.COOPER, VENTRILOQUIST.
COOPER!
The Triple Voiced Marvel. Black Napoleon of Ventriloquism. Different from all others, in an entirely new act, with
RICHARDS & PRINGLE'S GEORGIA MINSTRELS

Cooper and four figures, circa 1900. Notice the two small figures have very long arms, typical of Shaw figures of the period.

whom looked Caucasian along with two walking figures; a gossipy old lady and a one-legged Civil War veteran on crutches, who hobbled onto the stage with Cooper. His use of a veteran is not surprising, as Cooper was born just after the dreadful Civil War and there were many veterans and amputees among the population.

Audiences everywhere adored him. Critics hailed his talent. On August 25, 1902, Cooper appeared in the Third Avenue Theater in Seattle, Washington. “One of the strongest features of the show this season is Cooper, the ventriloquist,” wrote the theatrical critic of the *Post Intelligencer*. “He introduces five figures, one of which is a mechanical walking figure. He talks in six different voices and within a second’s time three different voices are heard.” This was no isolated praise. He was popular wherever he appeared.

They preferred his courteous approach over the risquè style so prevalent during the middle to late 1800s. He was proud of his billing, “The Cleanest and Most Wholesome Program On Earth.” This would be more than just a line on a playbill. It would be his ticket to vaudeville — even though he was barred from “white theater” at this time. An unexpected turn of events would make him more than welcome there. As a main act, in a wide-open field, the soft-spoken Cooper would further build up his repertoire and his reputation. As surely as John Cooper made his mark in minstrel shows, he would make a marketable act in vaudeville by creating a clever scene with several figures in a common setting familiar to everybody. He would enjoy his long career, and so would his audiences, from the early minstrel days through the heights of the bright lights, spanning The Golden Age of ventriloquism in America, to its fading away. We continue with John W. Cooper’s career in the next chapter, so let us look at those glorious days of the bright lights.[28]

Chapter VII
The Golden Age

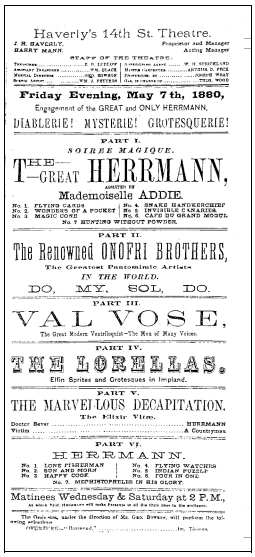
The roots of American ventriloquism set the stage for The Golden Age, but it did not arrive all at once. Time transformed ventriloquism from a secret — and sacred — integral part of the religious practices of the society for which it was a ploy to abuse, to become an important part of the society where it was applied to amuse

Once ventriloquism had shed its aura of darkness, dedicated practitioners accepted the challenge of keeping ventriloquism in the limelight. They considered themselves vocal illusionists and were never satisfied to be thought of as mere manipulators of disembodied voices. Competition, the need to be different and original, plus a theatrical flair, inspired them to improve and enhance their productions with novelties and diverse talents.

In this way the art progressed from European parlor entertainment reserved for royalty; through street fair fare; to taverns, then to an established niche in music halls and English “Variety”; while across the Atlantic to the streets of America, in early fairs, halls and “museums” to later American minstrel shows; and ultimately to vaudeville which shared many performers with English Variety. Thus, the fraternal twins of variety and vaudeville are the focus of this chapter.

While there is an almost untraceable interplay of events that lead to a particular situation, it appears that, as society-at-large developed, six distinct elements converged to give us ventriloquism’s Golden Age — defined as the era when top ventriloquists were accorded the stature of today’s movie and sports stars, and even the average ventriloquist was well respected.

The first element was the Industrial Revolution, which packed people into cities. Thus, it increased the need for diversion. The second was both the development of entertainment “combines” that built or acquired large theaters, and the expansion of a method of transporting vast numbers of acts to circulate from city to city, and theater to theater on one of the three major “Vaudeville Circuits.” The third was the cycle from using no figures to the use of many, back down to the use of one or two. The fourth was the staging of those figures. The fifth was the attitude toward the material, which suddenly changed from crude to prude. The sixth was the emergence of extremely remarkable and luminous performers on both sides of the Atlantic, who catapulted ventriloquism to the head of the class acts. One of those so gifted was the American ventriloquist, The Great Lester, while Fred Russell and Arthur Prince of



Haverly's 14th St. Theatre.

J. H. HAVERLY, Proprietor and Manager
HARRY MANN, Acting Manager

STAFF OF THE THEATRE:

Friday Evening, May 7th, 1880,

Engagement of the GREAT and ONLY HERRMANN,

DIABLERIE! MYSTERIE! GROTESQUERIE!

PART I.
SOIREE MAGIQUE.
THE GREAT HERRMANN,
assisted by
Mademoiselle ADDIE.
No. 1. FLYING CARDS. | No. 4. GRAND HANDKERCHIEF
No. 2. WONDER OF A POCKET | No. 5. INVISIBLE CANARIES.
No. 3. MAGIC CONE | No. 6. CAFE DU GRAND MONDE.
No. 7. HUNTING WITHOUT POWDER.

PART II.
The Renowned ONOFRI BROTHERS,
The Greatest Pantomimic Artists
IN THE WORLD.
DO, MY, SOL, DO.

PART III.
VAL VOSE,
The Great Modern Ventriloquist—The Man of Many Voices.

PART IV.
THE LORELLAS.
Elfin Sprites and Grotesques in Impland.

PART V.
THE MARVELLOUS DECAPITATION.
The Elixir Vitæ.
Doctor Berr ..... HERRMANN
Victim ..... A Countryman

PART VI.
HERRMANN.
No. 1. LONE FISHERMAN | No. 4. FLYING WATCHES
No. 2. BOY AND MONK | No. 5. DOUBLE PUZZLE
No. 3. HAPPY DOOR | No. 6. FOUR IN ONE.
No. 7. MEPHISTOPHELES IN HIS GLORY.

Matinees Wednesday & Saturday at 2 P.M.,

The Orchestra, under the direction of Mr. Geo. Bowles, will perform the following selection:
OVERTURE—"Rosamond," ..... Jos. Thomas.

England are part of the mix. These six elements were the basic building blocks of the Golden Age. Their combination occurred in a way and at a time in history that was spectacular good fortune.

Gone, But Not Forgotten

In 1880, a critic wrote, "**Val Vose** the ventriloquist could do almost anything with his voice." Vose performed with Alexander Hermann, who was a most illustrious magician in his day, as seen in the opposite box.

At this phase of the Industrial Revolution most of the hard-working Americans, who were putting in long hours and confined to cramped living quarters in overcrowded cities, sorely needed diversion from their daily grind. Therefore, minstrel shows and vaudeville increased in popularity. The concentration of population would enable big theaters to flourish.

Before the automobile made everyone mobile, before air transportation, before superhighways, it was the railroads which began to crisscross America. The growth of the railroads was part of, and fueled by, the Industrial Revolution. While the railroad carried goods and travelers almost everywhere, it's most significant contribution to the Golden Age was its ability to transport armies of vaudeville performers and their props and scenery, to the far-flung cities of the vast United States.[29]

The early days of England's Music Halls/Variety and America's Vaudeville theaters were a time of transition for ventriloquists. While many continued to perform without figures, their days were numbered, for the dummies soon outnumbered the ventriloquists. The larger theaters needed something more visible to fill their stages, so that the distant back rows could see the action. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, some manipulators used at least six, seven, or more, dummies on stage at one time. They were on stands, or seated on chairs and benches, usually in a semicircle. Operating them was much like the technique used by a Swiss bell ringer. The artiste would pass behind each of the figures in turn, conversing and working its mouth string, by hand or with a foot pedal, to create the effect of the figure speaking. The performer spoke with only one figure at a time. There was no interaction between the other characters, which sat there in line, looking totally stiff and completely lifeless. Before microphones, performers had to project their voices throughout these large theaters.

Then there was...
...a "Professor Hilton," in 1868, who advertised three singing and talking heads. Being excellent was surely no guarantee of being remembered, either. In 1875, one reviewer touted Harry Kennedy, by commenting about, "The excellence of his ventriloquism which has never been excelled if equalled." Kennedy performed at Barnum's American Museum and used both knee figures, and bust type figures on stands. William Francis Chalet used Black and White standing and seated figures of adults and children.

Let us remember:
A.O. Duncan. We know of his presence in 1883, and that he influenced John Cooper and inspired Harry Lester, who would become known as, "The Great Lester." Another blade of grass in the far-flung field of ventriloquism was R.H. Mohre, circa 1891.

Stiff competition promoted escalation, further increasing the number of wooden and *papier-mâché* supernumeraries.

When six or seven became common, more were added. Eventually the stages on both sides of the Atlantic were cluttered with glassy-eyed, silent staring faces. Many waited their turn to speak, while others served merely as stage dressing; a case of dummy overkill, but this phase too, evolved. Some outstanding performers demonstrated their cleverness by developing skits and plays with plots in which the dummies were all cast members in thoroughly thought-out productions. That helped steer the dialogue from men-only material to a more theatrical production, to appeal to a wider audience, but it wasn't enough. December 20, 1880, New York's Broadway was first lighted by electricity and became known as the "Great White Way. It heralded a new era.

Tony Pastor, a performer turned producer, is often called the Father of Vaudeville because he changed that assortment of sordid presentations. In 1881 he allowed only clean, class acts to appear in his establishments. Children and ladies were encouraged to join the male audiences. The family show was encouraged. To further stimulate and increase this market, he gave dress patterns or sewing kits to each of the ladies, another early example of the premium incentive business. With these actions, he effectively tripled the audience and his profits. As a major player, he led the way — to usher in the next phase of the Golden Age. Cleaning up their acts meant that words and phrases such as: liar, slob, son of a gun, devil, sucker, damn and others were strictly banned. Things have surely changed today.

During this time one inventive performer was honing his skills. Though his act was clean, he was however, barred from vaudeville because of his color. Unfortunately vaudeville in the early days reflected the prejudices of society, and excluded black performers. It was during this time of rampant discrimination that John Cooper, proud that he did not need off-color material to mesmerize audiences, rose to become a top minstrel act, after that field admitted Negroes. The word Negro came from Eden's translation of Peter Martyr's *Decades of the New World or West India*, 1555 and simply meant, "a black-skinned person from Africa or of African descent." However, slavery in this hemisphere started in the 1600s and progressed at a phenomenal rate, and was a pervasive practice. Oddly, in 1830, the U.S. Census Bureau tallied 3,777 Negro heads of families, mostly in Louisiana, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina, who owned slaves. Near the turn of the century, during the minstrel/vaudeville era, the Negro performer had vicious "Jim Crow" staring at him wherever he went. It was a term that came from the first modern, and racist, minstrel act by a fellow named Thomas Dartmouth Rice, in 1832. What it meant in actual terms was that the Negro could not get a fair deal. Discrimination was pervasive. Agents offered Negroes less money for an act that was superior to that of a white performer. "Jim Crow" ruled in hotels, in eating establishments, in transportation, where "colored folks" were not allowed to mix with white folks. Cooper felt the cruelty of it all. With the irony of a comedian's mind, he noted that many of the white people, who applauded him on the stage, would scream frantically if they saw him walking into "**their** white" restaurant or café. He did acknowledge that in the

theatrical profession, [after minstrelsy] among actors, the race, creed or color of a performer generally had nothing to do with his standing. Cooper noted, “It’s the ability of the artist that counts, his attitude toward his fellows.” But he did work at a time when discrimination would be put to the test. The test was financial.

When white vaudeville performers went out on strike, demanding more money, discrimination became economically unsound. Suddenly, black performers were needed to fill in, lest the theaters close. The show must go on! The income must come in! So much for the fact that it was these whites who created the theater. The strike created an instant demand for talented, though not well known, Negro performers, to fill the specialty/novelty/loyalty gap. Cooper’s time had finally arrived. He was ready. Because Vaudeville, led by Tony Pastor, had instituted strict requirements, the top spots only went to performers who could get attention, develop a warm rapport with a diverse audience, impress with exquisite skill, finish with a flair, use family material, and do it all in exactly ten minutes. In 1909, as a veteran ventriloquist, John Cooper would fill the bill, smoothly switching from minstrel to vaudeville. In addition to having perfect comedy timing, he had perfect career timing as well.

Without knowing it, vaudeville had been waiting for John W. Cooper, too. Hilarious, “polite,” and technically proficient, he was a crowd pleaser wherever he traveled. As “The Black Napoleon of Ventriloquism,” Cooper conquered audiences everywhere, becoming the Jackie Robinson of ventriloquism, nearly half a century before Jackie did it in modern baseball! His stardom was well deserved. He did not use dummies as stage dressing, but developed brilliant routines for those times. He is best remembered for an ingenious, intricate scenario entitled *Fun In A Barbershop* where he proved his vocal virtuosity by using five distinctly different or contrasting voices, in addition to his own natural one. The scene, a colored barbershop for white folks, was contemporary then, when it opened in 1909. That was when shaves were ten cents and haircuts were fifteen cents, or both for a grand total of twenty-five cents, which is where the catchphrase/song “Shave and a haircut, two bits,” came from. Two bits was slang for twenty-five cents, from the bygone days of chopping a silver dollar into eight pieces or bits, to make change. A nice tip was five cents.

THE NEW YORK AGE. THURSDAY. MARCH 13, 1913.
HOW MUCH IS TWO TIMES FIVE?
OH! FIFTY-FIVE
Marshall & Tribble and John W. Cooper at the Lafayette Theatre
The press liked Cooper. His act is featured in this cartoon/sketch with another act Along the bottom: the manicurist, Sam the wisecracking bootblack boy in the towel box, Cooper giving a haircut, the paperboy with his pouch marked “PAPERS.”

Cooper, in the role of the barber, engages in chit chat with the various characters there, *while his hands are busy giving a haircut* to “Mr. Haskins,” a regular customer. The manicurist is Miss Auto, a name which perhaps comes from “automaton,” (aw tom´ uh tn) a word commonly used for figures and animated characters at the time. She is seated, waiting for Mr. Haskins to leave the barber chair. Anticipating his turn in the barber chair is another regular customer, “Mr. Jenkins.” As for Sam, the

bootblack, well, he has his own story. For now, Sam imitated the picking of a banjo, accompanied in a ragtime song by his cohort, Jimmy, the newsboy, who is seen hawking his papers. If you guessed that the music was Cooper performing polyphony, you get an "A." But Sam always got carried away and, to quiet him down, Mr. Cooper, the barber, placed him in the towel discard box — to no avail. Whenever a soiled towel was deposited into the box, Sam's head would suddenly pop out, and that is what is captured in the cartoon. Off to the side, not shown in the cartoon, is a parrot on a perch. Cooper was excellent at mimicking a singing parrot ventriloquially.

How, you might ask, in an age before electronics and the "remote control" could one ventriloquist activate so many characters at the same time, without his hands, or while his hands are busy with a haircut? Like others faced with the same problem in this era, Cooper developed manipulative devices which were shrewd. They required much fine-tuning to achieve professional reliability and portability, with many sleepless nights to get the act to that state, so that he could take it from state to state across America and perform it with confidence. While his hands were busy, supposedly giving a 'haircut,' he stood in back of the barber's chair, which had a large hollow square base. Attached to all the members of the cast were steel wires and fishing line. They, in turn, were attached to a series of foot pedals inside the chair's base. Thus, he performed his whole act with his feet, which was literally quite a feat.

While Cooper devised the methods, he did not make the figures. He purchased professional ones. The mulatto manicurist cost $35 from the famous Le Mare & Son, Manchester, England. Some of the other figures were produced by Thomas W. Yost, of Philadelphia. Cooper was also one of the first to introduce a talking parrot. It was made by Louis Grannatt, Brooklyn, New York.

Some of Cooper's diversions were surprising. In addition to Sam popping out of the towel box, one figure was even rigged to walk across the stage. This presentation, created, written and presented by Cooper, played the finest theaters in six coast-to-coast tours, around 1907, appearing with such renowned artists as Madame Patti, Flora Batson and Henry Strange. Cooper was a favorite with audiences and critics alike, receiving their highest commendations, during Vaudeville's span.

As American ventriloquism was moving toward its Golden Age, so too was England's Music Hall/Variety. With ships crisscrossing the Atlantic, they would later share some of their finest acts on a regular basis. In fact, Cooper would become friends with all the top ventriloquists, "But," Cooper acknowledged, "the competition was terrific." What an understatement. Anyone who was lucky enough to see any of those acts would remember them for a lifetime. The competition came from both

J[ohn]. W. Cooper's ventriloquism is of the improved kind," in the Portland, Oregonian, Sept. 8, 1902.

"Cooper's ventriloquism is beyond criticism. Close inspection fails to reveal the slightest motion of the performer's lips." The Miner, Butte, Mont., July 22, 1902.

"J.W. Cooper proved to be the most talented ventriloquist ever seen In this city." Daily Nonpareil, Council Bluffs, Iowa, Feb. 2, 1902.

"J.W. Cooper is a ventriloquist of more than usual ability." The Telegram, Winnipeg, Canada, July 2, 1902.

sides of the Atlantic. There was an unparalleled parallel growth of the British "Music Hall" which came slightly before vaudeville, and which eventually led to the first, and some say the "only" genuine, Royal Command Variety Performance, at the Palace Theatre, Shaftsbury Avenue, on July 1st 1912. There had been other command performances, but this was a first for a variety show, attended by their Majesties King George the Fifth and Queen Mary. Arthur Prince and Jim were the first-half closing act. Noted magician David Devant, was on the bill, along with other luminaries. To commemorate the occasion an elaborate program was printed. It included *The Story of the Music Hall* by Henry George Hibbert, from which the following is excerpted:

> "INNOCENTLY to amuse the imagination, in this I dream of life, is happiness." Surely when Oliver Goldsmith made this phrase, he put before the eyes of the music hall manager an unimprovable ideal!
>
> There has always been a world-hunger for amusement for sheer amusement; something less solemn than Shakespeare, more material than the musical glasses. And to this the music hall is the minister. They do the variety stage an injustice who would have us believe that it is just a growth from the song and supper room of half a century ago. Why, its foundations are in remote antiquity; and it can marshal a patron saint of the most exemplary character.
>
> The original Impresario was surely Raher, first Prior of Saint Bartholomew's, who would descend upon the fair of his founding, and resume his original character of a jesting-juggler, to replenish the alms-chest of his beneficent order. In the records of the priory, laboriously penned and painted by holy men, are quaint little pictures of acrobats, and educated animals, balancers and boisterous comedians, who flourished under his patronage. Raher knew the desire of the people for frivolous recreation, and wisely reckoned with it. His fair endured seven centuries. At its zenith, Ben Jonson made it the background of a play; its doom was pronounced by an early Victorian Alderman! Among its constituents were the puppet show, the miniature theatre, the menagerie, and the circus. From all, variety has taken a toll so heavy, that the remnant does not matter now. In like manner it depleted the "talent" of the tea gardens. The song and supper room proved a convenient place for the arrangement and exploitation of the spoil — and thus, the modern music hall acquired its special form and character of entertainment.
>
> Rivals of the early music halls, eventually absorbed, were the "saloon " theatres distinguished from houses with the then significant prefix "legitimate." They made up their liberal programmes of melodrama, musical comedy, and variety. The audience was free to smoke and drink, and ate prodigiously. In time the saloon-theatre was called upon to accept a regular theatrical licence, or to become a music hall. Three famous saloons, the Britannia, the Grecian, and the

Effingham became, and long continued, theatres. Others-the Apollo, for instance — disappeared.

Of the song and supper room, the immediate ancestor of the music hall, we have a vivid picture — thanks to Thackeray, whose Back Kitchen and Cave of Harmony have been laboriously identified with the Cider Cellars at the back of the Adelphi, and the Coal Hole, near the site of which Terry's Theatre was built,...(p.15-16)

British ventriloquist and author, Val Andrews, explains that:

Many of the old Stars of Music-Hall were too bawdy for variety, and vanished forever. But many of them were able to adapt to the new medium. In time variety created it's own stars, and the supporting acts, "specialties" were recruited from circus, concert-hall and divers other places. Among those who came in from the cold were the ventriloquists, who soon became an essential part of variety.

Until that time the ventriloquist in Britain had existed in lowly-form: the "busker", itinerant market-square performer, or the seaside "alfresco" worker. The latter usually worked seated on top of a pair of folding step ladders (for greater visibility) on many a resort shore or promenade. One such resort was Brighton, on England's Sussex-coast. I lived there as a boy, and saw one of the last of these alfresco-vents at work. He was an incredibly aged man called Nelson Hardy who worked with a somewhat battered red-haired doll. The character had a "light-up-nose" which was actually a torch bulb [flashlight bulb] and battery, and each time this phenomena occurred it would plead: "Blow it out 'ardy!"(Both doll and ventriloquist sharing a quite common English inability to sound the "aitch".) Nelson also presented "distant-voice" effects, and when he made a collection at the end of each exhibition he appeared to do well. (Well enough, obviously, to have been uneedful of progress to the variety-stage.)

A rare photo of a young Coram.

Val will share more recollections and insights later. During those very early days of the Golden Age on that other side of the ocean, England's Tommy Whittaker appeared in an amusing sketch called, *The Joys Of A Motorist*, in 1904. The curtain rose to reveal his *papier-mâché* partner at the side of a road. Whittaker then drove on stage in an early model motor car. During the ensuing conversation, he manipulated the figure's movements remotely with a compressed air mechanism. After the lively exchange of patter he drove off, leaving his dummy to receive the applause.

Though the act was quite memorable, an agent suggested he change his name to a shorter, more easily remembered one. Through a window in the agent's office Whittaker spotted a lamp post with a sign reading "Coram St." It looked good on the sign and he reasoned it would look good on a marquee. And so Tommy Whittaker became Tom Coram.

Coram and Jerry on stage.

Using the condensed stage name, he now expanded upon his ingenious theatrical and mechanical techniques and developed other routines. For one, he used a backdrop painted to resemble the facade of the St. James Palace. His figure, "Jerry Fisher," was dressed as a guardsman on duty, standing at attention outside the palace gate. Coram, in the uniform of a Captain of the Guard, approached Jerry, who saluted the ventriloquist. Coram returned the salute. They engaged in light banter. At the conclusion, Jerry sang his theme song, "Me name is Jerry Fisher... The pride of the old militia...," as Coram held his hand and, to thunderous acclaim, they both walked offstage! Val Andrews will give his recollections of Coram shortly.

Coram's unique artistry, including Jerry's astoundingly lifelike demeanor, had special appeal and garnered much comment. Most audiences had never before seen a dummy walk; therefore, conjecture about the method was a prime topic. Some even wagered that Jerry was actually a live human.

As the form evolved to elaborate setups, another fine act, presented in the English Music Hall, was a clever mock trial: *Sylvester VS. Fitzhollmondyley in Breach of Promise*. This well coordinated, full-stage production, which displayed a fairly accurate English court of law as its set, was presented by Fred Russell.

The 'trial' involved a damage suit for five thousand pounds, for the failure of the defendant to marry the plaintiff. The cast included a Judge in wig and robe, a jury of twelve men, the defendant, dude in dock, defense 'counsil', 'counsil' for the plaintiff, policeman acting as usher, two witnesses, the plaintiff's landlady with her baby, and a minor character called Coster Joe, a call boy in a page's uniform. Russell's wife played a lawyer. The cast numbered twenty-one. The operation of the characters was controlled by a network of pneumatic tubes extending from a remote organ-like foot pedal console at Russell's feet. His busy "dancing" feet were blocked from the audience's view by a podium.

The trial scene.

It was all quite brilliant. A trial is organized so that only one person speaks at a time, perfect for a ventriloquist. Instead of a row or semicircle of glassy-eyed dummies, he had a whole courtroom of very attentive listeners!

This complex production required more than a year of preparation, with much refining and constant practice prior to its premier at Liford Hippodrome Theatre, London, in 1923. It was a sensation and toured continuously for nearly three years. While all the praise was pouring in, Coram suddenly changed course.

Russell cast aside the entire cast. Except one. Perhaps it was the expense and physical effort of transporting and setting up the stage sets and all the props and baggage as they moved from town to town — the trials of running the trial. Apparently on the theory that less is more, he decided to concentrate on the personality of a bit player in the story. Russell is credited with being the first to introduce a complete, major music hall act using only one figure. It sat on a stand next to him, as they conversed in front of the stage curtain. It was in stark contrast to the elaborate production he had used so successfully, and of the style others still utilized.

Russell and Coster Joe

Coster Joe at the Club, waiting for his cue

Fred Russell, born Thomas Frederick Parnell, was one of the first performers to utilize this simple style of performing. While this drastic change shocked his peers, it ushered in the second phase of the Golden Age of Ventriloquism, an era when the art, in its many forms, gained popularity and was presented in theaters everywhere. Russell's choice of a co-star was Coster Joe. A coster was a vendor. Now that there were only two performers on stage, Russell, in effect, made him an "equal" partner. Coster Joe achieved fame as his pearly suited pal with an authentic Cockney accent. The original Coster Joe resides in London's Water Rats Club Museum, an exclusive club whose members are all in the theatre. It is the British version of America's Friar's Club.

Ventriloquism and Kindred Arts was published in 1910, in London and Fred Russell is listed as the author. Russell's son, Val Parnell, became the managing director of the Empire Theatre, Glasgow, and then manager of the most fashionable theatre of them all, the prestigious London Palladium. Another son, Russ Carr, performed ventriloquism using a soldier dummy, but, talent aside, it was quite a different era, and he never achieved his father's fame as a ventriloquist. After all, few others did.

For his outstanding contribution to the art, Fred Russell was dubbed The Father of Modern Ventriloquism, although in America, that title was bestowed almost unanimously on The Great Lester, the legendary performer. In their own ways, The Great Lester and Fred Russell, though different, were equals. Each was truly a giant.

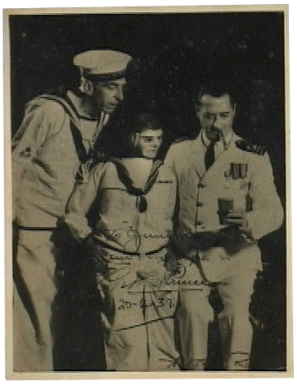
At different times, on both sides of the ocean, spectacles with a military motif would come in and out of vogue. While the veterans present were particularly entertained by the Army or Navy dialogues, everyone enjoyed them.

Arthur Prince was an accomplished magician, though he is best remembered as one of England's finest ventriloquists. Building upon Russell's progressive style, Prince took the best of both the cluttered full-stage and the basic knee figure methods. He chose not to hark back to myriad characters on a full stage or merely present a comedy duet with a series of unrelated, or loosely tied together jokes in front of a nondescript curtain. He created a combined style which was obviously influenced by the legitimate theater. His refined approach resulted in a sort of plotted mini-play with a professionally written dialogue. It was backed up by related scenery, furniture and props. He even went so far as to eliminate the ugly shine on the dummy's face, by applying theatrical makeup on the figure's face as well as his own.

His elaborate sketch, entitled *Insubordination*, took place in front of a detailed backdrop depicting a battleship. The storyline, and comedy dialogue, had Prince reprimanding Jim for infractions of Naval rules and regulations. My friend, and Prince's Fellow Englishman and entertainer, Val Andrews, supplied this description of the act and some of Princes's dialogue: [notes have been added for clarity], as well as some for Coram.

> But of those who learned their business in this new "variety", perhaps the greatest was Arthur Prince. He dominated the scene from 1905, until his death in 1947. What were his secrets ? There were several: he was a very good ventriloquist, he had his own stage-setting, but above all he was a very fine "showman".
>
> As the orchestra played "A Life On The Ocean Wave" the tabs [curtains] would open to reveal a full stage-setting of the deck of a battleship. Seated on a binnacle, slightly to one side, would be Prince's sailor-doll "Jim" in "authentic" uniform and sailors hat. Beside him stood Prince's assistant/dresser "Mack", in petty-officers garb. Prince would make his entrance from the "O.P" side always: and what an "entrance" it was. In Naval-Officers uniform, complete with sword and greatcoat, he would salute. Mack would return the salute, nudging Jim and gruffly muttering "Orf 'at:" [take **off** your **(h)at**] Jim would toss his head, and his round sailors cap would sail into the wings. (Mack was of course operating the doll at this stage.) As Prince walked over toward Jim he would dismiss Mack, saying: "So this is the new recruit... I'll have a word with him." Mack would exit and Prince would sit down beside Jim, in a folding chair, removing his hat. He would light a cigar, as Jim watched him, fascinated. The main part of the act consisted of quick-fire dialogue....

Actually, Prince's uniform and its decorations had to be incorrect in order to comply with the law. In England, an actor may not wear a correct military or naval uniform on stage



L to R,Mack, Jim and Prince

"Why did you join the Navy?

"Well, to see the World Sir...and first thing they did was shove me down in the submarines:"

Prince would remonstrate with Jim concerning his failure to rise early:

"Where were you at Six A.M?

"In bed Sir....as any Christian should be!"

This line invariably got a round of applause. Sometimes Jim would be bold enough to venture a question:

"Will I ever be an Officer Sir?"

"Oh, possibly....someday!"

"When will I get to go on leave?"

"Oh...one day!"

"Is ONE day any relation to SOME day Sir?"

Arthur Prince and Jim on the cover

After perhaps twelve minutes, Mack would re-enter, bearing a glass of stout [strong, very dark beer or ale] on a tray. As Prince took the drink and started to sip it, Jim would shout at the retreating Mack: "Oi....have you only got ONE EYE?" As Prince drank more deeply Jim would say: "He gets the drink.....and I get the...(BURP)!".

Mack would return, and stand by Jim as Prince drained the glass. Jim would comment..."Going...going...GONE!" This was always much applauded. In fact that final "Gone' was supplied by Mack! (until recently this fact was a closely guarded secret. But it's revelation does nothing to diminish Prince's image. It took a master-showman to conceive this brilliant piece of ventriloquial stagecraft.) The three characters would indulge in a "patriotic song" for the finish. Usually this would be "Sons of the Sea": although during both World Wars a number called "Let's Get Together and Go To It" was substituted. As the last note was uttered, Mack would whip the head from Jim's body: as if to disprove to the audience the possibility of a child or midget! (as little people were called then)

Arthur Prince took a "curtain" as skillfully as he made an entrance. He usually needed to take several. He would salute, first to the "rich-people" in the stalls and boxes, next to the pit and gallery, and on his final curtain he would lean forward and shake hands with the musical-director.

He was a fine looking man, tall, square-jawed and masculine. His appearance scarcely seemed to alter during his all but forty-year run: thanks partly to "Leichener" and a very well-made hairpiece. Throughout his long career, Prince invariably presented the act described. But there was a short period during World War Two when

> he had an alternative presentation. In this he used a full-size Officer-Cadet doll, with the scene as a Naval-Hospital. The theme was that Prince was visiting the youth, who was recovering from war-wounds. (Which cunningly explained the walking-doll's stiff gait!) It was a splendid act, but the public never took it to their hearts as they did the original act. It was therefore just an occasional departure. (It is possible that Prince used the act in the First World War originally.)
>
> It was at the Metropolitan Music-Hall in London's Edgeware Road that I saw Arthur Prince for the very last time, only weeks before his death. I was surprised to see him enter in his usual officers uniform, but minus his sword and greatcoat. He seemed as skilled and energetic as ever, but I have since pondered that he was already too weak to bear the weight of the heavy coat and sword. The fact that I can remember so much about Prince unprompted by any sort of notes, emphasises what a memorable performer and showman he was.
>
> Arthur Prince had but one rival as a Variety ventriloquial "headliner", "Coram" who with "Jerry Fisher" presented a military scena against a backdrop of Buckingham Palace, with that cheeky youth as a mounted guardsman, seated on a realistic dummy horse. As a Guards-Officer, Coram "fed" lines to "Jerry" and received cheeky rejoinders. His career was rather shorter than Prince's, but for some years the two shared the distinction of being variety's only vent-stars. Coram's death in the late 'thirties left the field clear once again for Arthur Prince. During his long career there was scarcely another "Star-Ventriloquist" in variety, which as a form of entertainment survived him by only a few years."

Val Andrews has given us an excellent view of the master at work, right to the end of his notable career. When it was originally presented in London, in the 1930s, *Insubordination* was such a refreshing change from the old-fashioned style of non sequitur gags and crossfire talk that everyone was delightfully surprised and impressed by the novelty. Prince tried further to reduce the feeling of 'theater' and simulate the feeling of informal reality by adding some casual byplay, which also added to his reputation. Take, for example, the cigar he smoked during the act. Impressive as it appeared, the cigar trick, rather than acting as an obstacle, actually helped Prince's ventriloquial technique. He inserted a match stick in the unlit end of the cigar. This protrusion enabled him to bite a grip on the stogie and reduce and disguise his lip and jaw motions.

Actor Fred Potter was the able-bodied seaman dressed as his steward. Yes, Prince was a master showman, skilled at both mimicry and 'milking' applause. Prince was an immediate sensation and soon became the highest paid vaudeville/variety ventriloquist of his day!

Val further describes Coram this way."Unlike his rival headliner, Coram used a variety of dolls during his career, including a sad white-faced clown which later

became the property of another vent, Saveen. I saw Coram work but once, when I was very young indeed, but in my memory he is engraved as a good ventriloquist with a first-class novelty."

Val points out that the brilliant Tom Coram was "in competition" with Arthur Prince, and almost as popular. They continually vied to outdo each other in countless ways. In 1926, when Prince came to America to appear at the famous New York Palace theater, the pinnacle of performing, he was advertised as, "The World's Greatest Ventriloquist." At the same time, Tom Coram arrived for an engagement at another Broadway theater. With a classic touch of immodest one-upmanship, Coram billed himself as, "Greater Than The Greatest."

Prince's *The Whole Art of Ventriloquism*, was published in London by W. Goldston. Prince was a meticulous performer who took special care of Jim, his inanimate partner. While traveling he would place the head of the figure between the legs of the doll to prevent breakage. This became a common practice used by others.

Arthur Prince died on April 16, 1945. In his will he had requested that Sailor Jim be buried with him. In compliance with this wish, Jim's head was placed between Prince's legs at the services. A star even in death, rumor has it that the public paid the undertaker a shilling per person to be allowed to gaze at Prince as he lay in the chapel. Even at rest in the box, he was still good box office.

He and Sailor Jim were interred in Hampstead cemetary, [the British spelling] borough of Camden, which houses Joseph Lister, and Marie LLoyd. Though he was gone, his influence lived on. Prince's style was emulated by others who developed productions, ranging from modest to elaborate, all of which displayed a distinctive, unifying theme. These might be played against a painted backdrop. Scenery, furniture and props related to the plot were sometimes incorporated, to help with the fantasy. Some shows resembled a Broadway production. The variety and creativity displayed by ventriloquists were amazing and unending. Highlighted here are sampling of acts.

Just as I clearly recall shows from my youth here, and unfortunately, could not grow up in two places, my dear friend Val Andrews, noted author, kindly shares memories of the wonderful acts he saw while growing up an ocean away.

> In an article on "Variety" I could have mentioned a ventriloquist called Harry Worth, but have saved him for this section for a special reason. Harry worked as a "straight" ventriloquist for many years with reasonable success. (Perhaps less than he deserved.) His scene was a café, with himself as a waiter, his dummy as the customer, and a tiny doll eventually introduced from behind the menu! One night Harry filled in a blank spot on the bill by just strolling on and pattering in his own voice. He was an instant success, and quickly became one of Britain's most endearing comedians in many a situation-comedy series! Later, having made a big name as a comic, he re-introduced his vent act for "personal appearances" by making it Lt "satire". He explained to the audience that in the past, audiences had refused to

believe that he was really talking for the doll. “So now, I allow my lips to move ever so slightly....” His difficulty in finding the right strings to pull completed the satire. This act so much suited his “Absent-minded-professor” style of delivery.

But then the “cod” vent act [put-on] was no new thing. A famous variety comedy duo: Dave and Joe O’Gorman presented such an act in the thirties. The eventually revealed gag here being the fact that the comedian hid behind a sofa to provide the speech for the doll operated by the straight man.

This theme was later expanded and presented with great gusto by veteran comedian Sandy Powell who works a “military” act rather like a satire on Russ Carr. The doll gurgles and splutters, as Sandy hides his mouth behind an outsize moustache. His wife, Kay White enquires: “Can Billy say calafragalisticexpialidocious ?” Sandy gasps, and replies: “If he does, he’ll do it on his own!” Sandy is a veteran of variety, but since its demise he has become something of a “cult” figure with the public via TV. (This renewed fame is greatly deserved.)

Neville King is another performer of the burlesque vent-act. He uses an “old-man” doll which he maltreats to an extent which makes the old time seaside-ventriloquist seem like a monument to patience and understanding. He beats up the poor old fellow, who puts up a terrific fight, losing arms and legs in the action! Neville is however a very fine ventriloquist, as distinct from a mere comedian performing a satire.

Hal Monty, a popular variety comic, used to hide behind his high-held doll, then nod and wink at patrons in the manner of a casual master-craftsman. He would point to the doll and say: “You want to get yourself one of these Lady... you could earn a few bob [a few shillings] at weekends round the clubs!”

I have tried to define in my mind the difference between British “Variety” and American “Vaudeville”, but I find this very difficult because the two forms of entertainment were very similar. Moreover, American vaudeville acts and British Variety-Artistes were interchangeable. Variety was the number-one entertainment for the masses in Britain from soon after the turn of the century, until “talking-movies” became popular in the early thirties. Even thereafter, Variety continued on quite a considerable scale until finally killed off by a number of converging circumstances by the late ‘fifties. (Those circumstances were the introduction of “commercial” Television, bad-management, lowering standards, and the fact that Variety had generally had it’s day and worn itself out.) It had outlasted it’s American counterpart by almost a score of years. We who loved variety bemoan it’s passing. It was always interesting through the diversity of it’s artistes and categories. It’s stages were

graced by many celebrities and even notorious characters from other spheres: Table-tennis champions gave exhibitions, as did expert fencers whilst an unfrocked clergyman or a disgraced politician pleading their cases were not unknown to variety patrons. [Much as these people make the rounds of radio and television talk shows today, except that the audience is much larger.]

During variety's "golden age" there were perhaps as many as a thousand such theatres in the British-Isles. These ranged from "number-one" theatres, on "circuits", through less important chains, and finally including a number of small or independently owned theatres. The mode of progress in variety was an obvious one. A performer would try first direct negotiation with owner-managers of the "smalls", and having obtained such bookings would try to interest the talent-scouts from the circuits. Many an artiste would work a "shop-window" [showcase, in America] week at one of the smaller theatres without pay, just to be seen. Once an act had gained the "promised-land" of a number-one circuit, he had to be careful not to fulfil engagements at less important venues, for a "snob-system" operated within the profession. [To bypass this in America it was a fairly common practice to do a slightly different act under a completely different name] Yet even so, there were artistes who managed to play all manner of dates, important and otherwise: but they were exceptions to prove a rule.

Most of the early variety-ventriloquists worked with a "line" of dolls, each with different appearance and characteristics. (Cheeky-boy, Old Man, Black faced-minstrel, Old Lady etc.) The first to break away from this format and feature a single strong character was Fred Russell with his famous "Coster-Joe". Fred worked in evening-dress, but the doll wore the traditional Coster's "pearlie" suit and cap. (A suit of clothes, covered entirely with thousands of individually sewn pearl-buttons, and favoured by London Street-traders for wear on high-days and holidays.) Fred spoke softly, but Joe was very coarse-voiced, and would ogle a woman in the audience, rolling his glass-eyes and exclaiming that she was "A bit ov orl roight:" Fred would remonstrate with him, and of course in this new "family-audience" setting Joe would never overstep the mark. There were other great vents, brought in from other mediums:

Of the vents who were variety "supporting-acts" I think Archie Elray was my favourite. With "Dorothy", and a galaxy of characters he presented a ventriloquial-scena titled "Cricket". The scene was a village-green, really a woodland glade cloth [backdrop]. I doubt if he toured it as every theatre boasted such a drop. There was a rustic bench, upon which were seated the "automata": these were an elderly gentleman and a cheeky youth in cricket flannels [uniform]. Seated to one side on a high stool, was a red-haired "cheeky-boy." Archie

would enter, immaculate, in sharp suit and snap brimmed hat, briskly dust off the bench with a handkerchief and then would sit between the youth and the old man. He would ask the youth, “Are you watching this game of cricket?” The youth would reply, “Watching? I’m IN it.. I’m last man in!” The old fellow would mutter now and then and comment that cricket games had “deteriated” since his youth. Dorothy would enter, in a floral summer-dress and picture hat. She would seat herself next to the youth and manage to arrange her voluminous dress partially over him. He would say: “Would you mind unveiling the monument?” When he enquired her age, she would reply, “Twenty-two!” This would get a good natured chuckle from the audience and the high-seated little boy would exclaim: “It’s a sin to tell a lie.!” (A popular song of the time) A diversion here, as Archie indulged in some “distant voice” work, with a newsboy’s voice being heard “from the wings.” As Archie reached the side of the stage the voice got louder. He reached in his pocket for a coin, and his hand disappeared into the wings, to reappear clutching a newspaper. He strolled back to the bench “reading”, and the newsboy’s voice grew fainter as it retreated.

This device invariably “brought the house down”. It was almost too good to be true and I sometimes wondered if it were faked: though I have no reason to suppose this, as it was technically well within reach of a good vent, which Archie Elray undoubtedly was. The act would finish with the old man singing “one of the old songs” to Dorothy, as she stroked his bald head. A real “classic” variety act. Archie Elray played all the very best theatres, right through the ’thirties, ’forties and fifties.

David Poole, billed as “The Schoolmaster Ventriloquist” had a businesslike vent-act as a schoolmaster clad in academic gown, with two dolls as “pupils”. The little girl had a shrill voice and there was nothing very “cute” about her. The little boy, a harsh character rejoicing in the name of “Johnny Green” was so rude that he was eventually placed behind a blackboard as a “punishment”. The little girl proved a slow pupil, finding it difficult to answer questions or remember her poems despite frequent ribald “prompting” from Johnny: his voice emanating from behind the board. Eventually she too was placed in the punishment area, and their voices alternated in amusing dialogue despite remonstrations from Poole. A sample...

Girl: “Johnny Green....Johnny Green’s trying to....”

Johnny: “Johnny Green....Johnny Green’s GOING TO:”

For the climax Johnny was brought forth again, to sing a rather pathetic little song, which pointed out all the things he **could** have been. The last line: “But I’m only little Johnny Green!” left hardly a dry-eye in the house. To sum up, one cannot criticise the construction of this act, or it’s entertainment value which was never in doubt.

Therefore any criticism of Poole's lip-technique would be superfluous. After all, in Variety, distance lent enchantment! He worked both the Moss and Stoll circuits. After Poole's death the act lived on in the hands of ventriloquist Nelson Lloyd. Though a far better technician, he never got as much from the situation as the originator.

Russ Carr presented a military scena, with the doll in a World War One soldier's uniform. Russ as an Officer looked convincing enough. But the act was perhaps the least distinguished of it's kind: it's only saving grace being a "mechanical" marching movement of the dolls legs in the finale. Surprising, when one knows that Russ Carr was a son of Fred Russell.

Wynne De Lisle, a rare Lady-vent, was active during and immediately after World War Two with an excellent act in which she played a "W.A.A.F." Probably the "Battle of Britain" with parachutists regularly baling out of planes that were shot down, and all of these pilots dropping out of the air, she was inspired to have her R.A.F. "Pilot" doll actually drop to the stage by parachute: A wonderful novelty and a first-class artiste.

Fred Lovelle had a very modern act with a single doll in evening-clothes. The feature of this act was the fact that the doll was an "impressionist". For a finish Fred put the doll into a suitcase and displayed brilliant technique as he made an exit carrying the case from which could be heard the muffled "song" of the irate doll. A fine artiste with great "attack" and superb technique and masterly lip-control. Fred Lovelle enjoyed quite a long career in variety, from the mid-thirties to the time of it's demise. The business with the doll in the suitcase was also featured by Arthur Worsley immobile-faced, casual vent with a single very loquacious doll: "Charlie Brown". Charlie literally did ALL the talking: So superb was Worsley's lip-control that the theme of the act was for the doll to keep directing attention to Arthur's face whilst talking. Not the slightest movement of the lips could be detected.! The roles of dummy and vent were all but reversed, with Charlie assuring the audience: "I've not had this one long you know!" And trying to coax the frozen-faced vent with phrases like: "You'll be alright Son...how about a tiny little smile?" Although variety has died, Arthur Worsley continued to be a success in other entertainment mediums. He has been active in the profession since the 'thirties.

Saveen is another ventriloquist who has outlived variety, professionally speaking. But his real setting was always in that glorious entertainment-form. Immaculate, with a galaxy of "Characters" ranging from the sharp-voiced "Andy Lang" through various animals, to the delightful little-girl character "Daisy May". The theme of his act was one of "versatility", with so many characters

and voices involved. Ever finding and exploiting “novelties”, his converse with a real live dog, which moved it’s mouth in perfect “timing” and spoke like George Sanders, took a lot of beating. His “exit”, with the dog on it’s lead was a classic of it’s kind. The act had style, class and pace. Ever publicity conscious, Saveen listed “Daisy May” in the telephone-book, and she had her own bank-account!

The brilliant Edgar Bergen not only spawned a score of imitators but paved the way for others who may not have achieved his astounding success but were inspired by his. One was British ventriloquist Peter Brough. Son of the long established vent, Arthur Brough, In the late nineteen-thirties and early forties young Peter gradually gained number-one dates without getting his name in big type on the bills. He had a good variety-vent act in the days before radio made him a star. Working with a single life-size youth, “Arthur”, he also presented a “head on cane” front-cloth novelty to climax his act. However, it was radio that changed all that, for the B.B.C., possibly influenced by Bergen’s radio success in America, built up Brough and made his dummy ‘Archie Andrews’ into the British ‘Charlie McCarthy’. They gave Brough his own show, ‘Educating Archie’, which was an almost immediate hit. Radio was the ideal medium for Peter Brough, a ventriloquist whose lip-control had never been a feature. On radio the very distinctive voice that he gave to young Archie was most entertaining. His show ran for fifteen years and produced fully a dozen new stars who in turn played Archie’s ‘Tutor’. (Tony Hancock, James Robertson Justice, and Jimmy Edwards to name but three.) Archie’s ‘little friend’ was played in the early days by schoolgirl Julie Andrews! [born Julia Wells]

Instead of trying to switch from radio to TV., Peter retired Archie. Had he seriously attempted to become big in TV, I think he might have surprised a public, long fed on stories to the effect that “Archie” was not even present at recordings! However, Brough eventually decided upon a career in business of another and possibly more lucrative kind, and became a very prosperous businessman, but not until he had entertained the Royal Family many times, and one incident with the Royal Family is related in the chapter “Every Country Has One.” Much cruel fun has been made by fellow ‘pro’s’ concerning Brough’s lip control. Yorkshire Comedian Sandy Powell was once heard to advise him to play the Nottingham Empire. He said, ‘You’d do well there Peter, they’ve got some terrible lighting!’ Despite such sniping, Peter Brough made Archie a household name, and he was the only other British ventriloquist to gain star-billing at his appearances, during Arthur Prince’s lifetime. Prince reigned supreme; the only theatre vent to get top billing. There was a time when Coram also got top billing while they were both at the top of the variety artists. It is a sobering

thought to realize that, at one time, ventriloquists were looked upon as the pinnacle of performers.

Another sobering, but unrelated thought, is the idea of a “drunk” wrestling with it’s presenter and generally acting in anti-social manner. Today, with a new look at an old problem and the social tragedies that result, it is not seen often. However, this was a character incorporated into several popular variety-ventriloquist’s acts. Perhaps the best-known of these was Raymond Smith, who through diminutive height managed easily to present a doll as large as himself. He made much use of a green spot-light, and the doll’s top-hat strategically placed in case it’s drunken queasiness became more menacing.

Naven O’Reilly’s “Drunk” was a little quieter. His act would open with Naven “discovered on”, [not entering to fanfare] seated at a table, reading the newspaper. The singing of his drunken friend could be heard from “off”. Naven would put down his paper and hasten to assist his “legless” pal to centre-stage. There an amusing converse would ensue. On the front-cloth Naven O’Reilly presented the finest “vent-dog” puppet ever! The way the realistic “Yorkie” glanced at his side-pocket for a reward in between yelps had to be seen to be fully appreciated!

James Tattersall also presented a drunk, who had difficulty standing.

Acts varied widely. Some were based on novelty, others were more standard, but quite popular nevertheless. During the Second World War a number of “concert artistes” became full-time professionals to fill the gap. Among the best of these was Clement Minns who presented a vent-act, obviously designed for use in a society drawing-room. But although presenting no novelties, and using just a single knee-figure he scored well.

Ken Swann worked in variety for any years, in the full kilted Scottish regalia that he still wears in other entertainment-fields. His harsh Scottish-youth doll was called “McGhee”. His best novelty was a mini-doll which crossed the stage, riding a tricycle as it sang!

Another fine vent act was that of Johnson Clark who used a single doll, “Hodge” representing a yokel, seated on a stile in rural setting. Clark was “The Squire” in breeches and tweeds, who, claimed that his car has broken down. He could get little sense from “Hodge” as to his location. They indulged in all those jokes in which the yokel scores off the city-slicker. “Do you know the way to Winchester?”

“No.”

“Well where’s the nearest garage then?”

“I don’t know.”

“I can see that you’re daft!”

“Daft I am, lost I ain’t!”

Suddenly the Squire would notice an emergency phone booth to

one side of the stage, so he stepped into the emergency telephone-booth, giving him opportunity for the telephone voice and to hold a three way converse “Hodge”(via remote control) chiming in. It was a well planned act which stood the test of time.

Norman Caley is a concert artiste who presents an act with a lot of props. (He does the long arms Jolson bit for example.) He finishes either with a vent toby-jug, or a paper ‘Cuckoo’. The latter is interesting because it is made up by origami in front of the audience. He even fits a dowel and thread control in front of the audience. It is quite large and the paper is coloured in such a way that when it ‘gapes’ the inside is red. It sings ‘The Cuckoo Song’. (‘Sing your song, sing your song, little Cuckoo..’ etc.) It is very well done and goes great with the audience. But he works very little, just the odd summer-season and a few club-dates in winter.

So much for the “native-product”, but variety, by it’s very nature, included many visiting acts from all over the world, including some ventriloquists. From Spain came Señor Wences, his first visit being in the mid-thirties. Here was “artistry” personified. From his measured entrance to a bullfighters-march, through his presentation of the “talking-hand” and “head in box” and his masterly exit, here was sheer “class”. Perhaps I appreciated and remember best his cameo of the voice in a box which is “N-n-not afraid” as the performer spins a brass plate on a rod just over his container! I cannot tell you just how good or otherwise his lip-control: Wences’ act is so entertaining and intriguing that one never thinks to watch his lips. He has survived variety and vaudeville and plays only the very finest locations in half a dozen capital-cities. He is able to do this because he is not only brilliant, but multi-lingual. At the time of his first visit to Britain he received a “Royal Command” to appear before King George and Queen Mary, who were widely quoted as being very amused and intrigued by his work.

Perhaps the most famous visiting ventriloquist to play British Variety was Edgar Bergen. He presented his clever act in which he sawed “Charlie McCarthy” in halves! We already knew from his movies that he did not worry unduly about lip-control: but this fact did not distract from a wonderful presentation with the emphasis on characterisation. Bergen visited Britain immediately before and soon after World War Two.

“Variety” had no “message”: it did not pretend to educate: merely to amuse, amaze and divert. In watching a first-class var iety show one could be sure to forget for a while the troubles of this world. This is only one reason for our being the poorer for it’s passing. The ventriloquists contributed greatly through the years to this unique “show”. There were never too many vents, but this made them the more popular.

Val mentions two names:Lawrence Glen, and G.J. Gulliver. (‘The vent with the laugh’.

Val has certainly enriched us with his recollections which help us to see the view from the other side of the sea. I would certainly have loved to grow up in both the United States and the United Kingdom, but Val's recollections are the next best thing. What a time that was for our art. The creativity was enormous. Unfortunately life was not all shows, and there were wars both here and abroad. They were such a part of the culture that, for many years, themes based on the armed forces went in and out of popularity on both sides of the Atlantic, as seen by the success of Arthur Prince. As it had done for John Cooper, The American Civil War, an oxymoron if ever there was one, provided a motif for George W. Harvel, who performed with two life-sized Civil War veterans. Each was a casualty missing a leg and supported by a crutch.

McGuinness also used a medical theme

Later, The Great (Bert) Howard, a native of Scotland, toured America and Canada during the 1923-1924 season with an enormous military stage production. His act, entitled *Behind the Lines*, showed that Howard was ahead of his time. He used a first-aid station setting, located at the rear of battle during the first World War. Fifty years later MASH (Mobile Army Surgical Hospital) and its comedic medics became the longest running American television series in the 1970s and 1980s, using just such a setting. Howard featured a British "Tommy" or "soldier" (see sidebar) and a Scot in kilts. The action took place inside an ambulance where Howard played the role of an army medical officer who treated the wounded soldiers. When the military theme faded from popularity Howard became a "painless" dentist. The plot was based on his hapless bungling which ultimately results in extracting the wrong tooth!

The Nurse is a figure. (Unknoiwn)

"Tommy" also tommy, short for Tommy Atkins, from Thomas Atkins, a name often used in Great Britain on sample forms, especially in the armed forces, and dates from 1815. Why that name was used at that time is not clear, but Tom, as in Tom Foolery, is an old name for buffoon. In the U.S. John Doe is similarly used on forms. In the U.S. army "GI" came from the label markings **"G**overnment **I**ssue" and GI Joe has an alliterative sound and is also a commercial brand name of an American toy soldier after the name was in popular use.
Tommy Gun is short for Thompson Submachine Gun, named for the manufacturer.

While ventriloquists were busy inventing novel ideas and routines in the early movie, radio, and pre-TV era of the 1920s and 1930s to feed the masses hungry for entertainment, more seeds of the TV era of mass entertainment were being planted. Ernst Frederick Werner Alexanderson, (1878-1975), a Swedish-born American electrical engineer and inventor, demonstrated the first practical television system in 1930. Practical, not quite commercially viable. Meanwhile, concert halls and vaudeville began to feel the inroads made by talking pictures and radio, as the practitioners supplied acts based upon a wide variety of situations and locations.

A playground scene

In addition to battleships and ambulances, soldiers and sailors, trials and even tribulations, almost every kind of locale or situation, fanciful or real, was created or recreated on the stage. It was delineated by a backdrop, setting, or focal point for the comedy confrontations, conversations, songs, dances and parodies. Locales included: parks, playgrounds, racetracks, hotel lobbies, street corners, vacation resorts, classrooms, farms, and domestic scenes. The targets of the humor ranged from human foibles, politics, the military, teaching and even to ventriloquism itself. Let us take a glance at them.

In that unsophisticated age, families were often amused by rural-based situations. A prime example of this was Ed Reynard's country-oriented show, *Morning In Hicksville*, reputed to be the biggest and best production of its time. Reynard conversed with the various characters, one of whom talks about his "father," a veteran of the Civil War.

"Why, sir, my father killed one hundred men in the war!"

"What was he, a gunner?" asks Reynard.

"Nope, a cook."

In the late 1920s, Hugh McCormack and Grace Wallace had an act called *On The Beach*. Played against a painted backdrop of a summer vacation resort, McCormack appeared as the hotel owner, while Grace Wallace and the figures played the beach goers. McCormack and Wallace, as the team was billed, were so popular that the Orpheum Circuit hired them to appear at all their theaters across the country.

Douglas Craggs was a most able artiste who published one of the better books on his craft, *The ABC's of Ventriloquism*, which set the standards for clear ventriloquial speech. Among the most amusing of his many sketches was a street scene entitled, *The Postman*. It featured a walking figure in the uniform of a British mailman who had a long gray beard. The scene opened with the incongruous sight of the elderly mail carrier, which caused an immediate laugh, since everyone realized it was a commentary on the slowness of the British postal service. The Postman was due in court to answer a summons for bopping his bride with a frying pan. Concerned that the charge might cause him to lose his job with the postal service, he asks Craggs to intercede with his brother, the magistrate. Shocked at the notion of tampering with the judicial system, Craggs declines. The postman, sadly resigned to his fate, reasons that, if he were fired, he could always make his living as a ventriloquist and reveals a dummy hidden in the mailbox. Craggs removes the small figure from the box and hands it to the old man. Craggs, doing all three voices at this point, has the mailman promise never to hit his wife again and they end by singing a popular song of the era, *Smiling Through.*

Jules Vernon's story is most unusual. As Billboard, the newspaper for the entertainment industry, put it in 1921:

His professional career dates back to 1883, with Maskelyne & Cook, at the Old Egyptian Hall, London England, when he assisted in magical productions. He came to the States two years later and successfully appeared in magic and mind reading turns. Later he employed ventriloquism and has come to be one of the best voice transmitters on the American stage. At one time he operated 18 figures in an. act. His correct name is Leycester Knyvett.[30]

He used a hotel lobby as the setting for his presentation. His figures depicted such guests as a sailor, a stuttering boy, a little girl, an old maid with metal teeth that kept clacking, as well as the hotel staff including a bellhop, a house detective, and an elevator operator who kept saying, "Going up!" as a running gag. He operated some manually and some via pneumatic hoses and foot treadles.

Vernon's figures at VHM

Vernon, the ventriloquist, was one of the acts that held down the boars in Cincinnati last week at the Palace Theater. Thousands of people saw his act. They admired his art and laughed heartily at the lively chatter and various movements of the six dummies used in the offering. None of the patrons knew that Vernon is blind.[31]

Mrs. Vernon (née [Minnie] Herold) lived with her husband in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, and joined the act in December of 1918, when he was stricken with the flu in Spokane, Washington. Although he survived, the high fever caused the loss of his eyesight. Despite this, Vernon did not want to leave show business. While searching for a cure, they decided to keep his affliction secret. He had his wife stretch a black thread between the stage entrance and his 'center of operations' so that he could continue to perform. Lightly holding this guide, which was invisible out front, he casually made his entrance and exit. This simple device worked; the public was unaware that the wonderful entertainer was totally blind. Then he pared down the act.

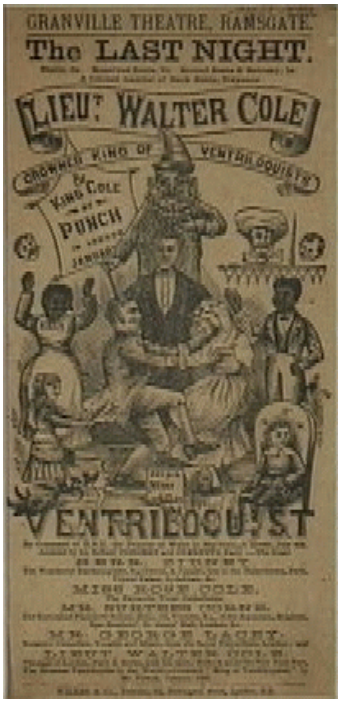
In his new act Vernon uses six dummies operating nine strings, an air bulb and one foot. "Tho I've been doing it now for six weeks," he said, "I haven't seen the act, but they tell me it is the best one I have worked." Cincinnati critics were loud in their praise of Vernon's work.[32]

Versatile Jake Sills has a story that parallels Vernon's. [See "Arti-facts"]

Great performances were not limited to international artists. North Americans made magnificent, original contributions to the art. Among them, Fred Ketch is mostly famous for doing two and three voices simultaneously. Some performers, then and now, fake it with a recorder, but his was legitimate.

A well-known ventriloquist, Fred Neiman, projected all the voices of a complete minstrel show. His company of blackface figures were dressed in typical minstrel garb. Neiman was part of the cast, playing the role of Interlocutor, all the while operating the entire production with a complicated system of air bulbs and wires. The happy songs and snappy patter, in Negro dialect, included such classic gags as:

Neiman:	"How are you today, Mr. Bones?"
Bones:	"I feel like a dead mule."
Neiman:	"Like a dead mule? How is that?"
Bones:	"Ah can't kick. Yuck, yuck, yuck!"
Neiman:	"And how are you, Mr. Tambo?"
Tambo:	"Ah is like a piece of tissue paper."
Neiman:	"Like tissue paper? How is that?"
Tambo:	"Tear-able, Mr. Interlocutor, just tear-able."



Apparently playing on the folk song, "Old King Cole," he called himself the King of Ventriloquists.

Unlike Neiman and his minstrels, Lester, on the other hand, prided himself on both the laughs he got and his unchallenged mastery of the art, while doing it all with only a single figure. He was respected and admired as "America's Premier Ventriloquist" by almost all of his peers. He brazenly paved new paths, entertaining in ways no one had before. There were many great acts in vaudeville. There were many excellent ventriloquists too. Before movies and television, vaudeville was the height of entertainment. However, once in a while a star comes along at just the right time to brighten an entire profession and rise higher than their peers. That triple combination of vaudeville, ventriloquism, and The Great Lester together, equaled the unequaled Golden Age of ventriloquism. While some of his stage act is detailed here, some of his acts of generosity and kindness appear in "The Birth of the Dummy."

Unlike others who performed with stages elaborately cluttered with many characters, fancy scenery, sets and props, Lester boldly worked on an almost empty stage. He sat on a simple chair, with only one figure on his knee, next to a small table which held only three props: a telephone, a wine decanter and a glass. That's it! But he was a master! Although he utilized no scenery, his act was so convincingly graphic that one could easily visualize the out-of-this-world locales with which his figure became involved on the telephone. The wine decanter and glass were used expertly by Lester in a visual-vocal bit that made them mutually famous.

Lester took credit for originating the "telephone voice" as a special type of distant voice trick, with a crisp, loud simulation of voices coming from the telephone at about the time telephones were becoming widely available. No one has disputed him, and few have ever equaled him. He did two and even three voices conversing with each other in the background. In those days, before microphones and amplifiers, the back rows of major theaters could clearly hear the telephone side of the conversation, such was his phenomenal ability.

Lester's magnum opus was an offbeat routine, "Heaven and Hell," in which his carved companion, Frank Byron Jr., tried to locate the final destination of his recently departed sister. Not knowing where his sibling was, Frank tried telephoning. Placing a person-to-angel call, he spoke with St. Peter and, to his dismay, learned that the lady was not registered behind the Pearly Gates. He then got on the hot line with a call to the "other place." He broke down crying upon learning that his sister was in Hades, shoveling coal. Here is a rare look at Lester's Bits of Business from a handwritten letter from E. Eadah, his third wife. Some of it sounds like dictation, some like reporting, some like copied notes, so it may be a transcript with commentary. [Slightly edited to improve readability]

Dialogue pertaining to Figure's family, [as above] - leads up to telephone bit: "Heaven and Hell"

Vent: Do you have a sister?
Figure I did have, but she died and went to Heaven.

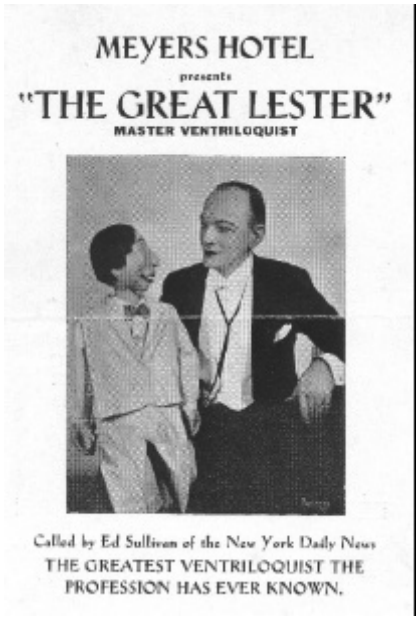
Vent: Oh, I am sorry to hear that, would you like to talk to her?
Figure: How can I do that?
Vent: It's quite simple. I will phone St. Peter.
(Vent lifts receiver of phone, tone signal is heard, then female voice.
Voice: This is central (operator), number please.
Vent: Will you put me through to Heaven please.
Operator: Hold the line please. (Do tone signal)
Voice: Hello, hello.
Vent: Yes. Hello, hello. Is that Heaven?
Voice: Yes, this is Heaven. Who is this?
Vent: This is Lester. Who am I speaking to?
(Figure is watching all this business. Keep him moving.)
Voice: This is St. Peter, keeper of the gates. What can I do for you?
Vent: I am trying to locate a young lady.
Voice: What is her name?
Vent: (To figure) What is your sister's name?
Figure: Frances Byron.
Vent: (into phone) Hello. (No answer) hello, hello.
Voice: Hello. Did you get the name?
Vent: Yes. It is Frances Byron.
Voice: Hang on. I will look in the book.
Figure: Gee, I hope he finds it ok. (Ad lib with figure for a few seconds)
Voice: Hello.
Vent: Yes, hello.
Voice: When did she arrive?
Vent: (To figure) When did she arrive?
Figure: Two weeks ago.
Vent: (into phone) Hello.
Voice: Yes.
Vent: She arrived about two weeks ago.
Voice: Two weeks ago? Hold the line. I will check again. (Tone)
Voice: Hello, hello.
Vent: Yes, I am here.
Voice: I am sorry, but there is no one here by that name.
(Figure looks at phone, then at ventriloquist)
Vent: (To phone) Thank you for your help. Good bye.
Voice: Sorry, goodbye. (Click of receiver being hung up.
At end of line, tone. Vent hangs up his receiver)
Vent: Well, your sister isn't there.
Figure: That's funny, she should be. (Figure looks at vent, then looks upward towards ceiling and back to vent then down to floor, then looks at vent)

Figure: You don't think... (his voice trails off)
Vent: That she went to the other place?
Figure: Yes.
Vent: Well, there is one way to find out. (Picks up phone - tone signal)
Operator: Number please.
Vent: Will you get me Hades, please.
Operator: Hold the line please. (busy signal) Hell, the line is busy. Will you call later?
Figure: Boy, that must be a busy place. Do you think she may be there? I hope not.
Vent: Hello operator. Will you try Hades again?
Operator: Hold the line (tone - click)
Voice: Yes, hello, hello.
Vent: Hello. Is that Hades?
Voice: Yes, yes, this is Hades. What the devil do you want?
Vent: I want to speak to the Devil.
Voice: This is the Devil speaking. What can I do for you?
Vent: I am trying to locate Frances Byron, would she be in your place?
Voice: Frances Byron? Hold on, I will look in the big Red Book. (Tone)
Figure: What do you think, Lester?
Vent: I don't know what to think.
Voice: Hello, hello.
Vent: Hello, I am here.
Voice: Yes, she is here.
Figure: Oh, my. See if you can talk to her.
Vent: Hello, Mr. Devil, can I talk to her?
Voice: I am sorry, but she is busy.
Figure: Busy doing what?
Voice: Shovelling coal. Good bye.
Vent: (hangs up) Well, there you are.
Figure: Oh, my poor sister. Down there shovelling coal, oh my poor sister, etc?

(Figure starts to cry. Do crying business, etc. use handkerchief, etc. have figure blow nose, dry figure's eyes, etc. then go into dialogue)

Clearly, Lester and Frank did not engage in the typical conversations, or banter, so commonly heard at that time. Lester showed off his ability in still another way. He gave Frank center stage. Lester presented a stern, aloof persona, while his talkative partner delivered a mocking monologue. The quiet Lester appeared bored, as though he found it hard to tolerate the situation any longer. This master of the art even yawned while Frank yakked! No matter what insults Frank Byron hurled at him,

Lester never moved so much as a muscle. Throughout the act Frank chattered away, taunting Lester, until, annoyed by the lack of response, he'd stare at Lester and inquire with sarcastic solicitude, "Am I boring you?" Still the butt of Byron's belittling did not respond. He merely stared back with his trademark unflinching, deadpan expression. A frustrated Frank asks, "Are you listening? A few more comments and Frank, awaiting some sort of response, just kept staring expectantly. After the perfect pause, he would slowly turn to the crowd incredulously and report, "Hey, this guy is dead!"



The laughter was thunderous. Dead he surely was not. Lester always strove for perfection and he liked to flaunt it. Appearing 'dead' showed off his technique, which is why he had wanted a figure that had more expression than his own face displayed. While Frank was chattering away, Lester was staring at his tall candlestick telephone. There he had concealed, inside the mouthpiece, a small round mirror, so that he could constantly monitor his, ever flawless, lip control.

At the conclusion of his hilarious act, Lester would boldly walk through the audience with all the house lights up. While Frank threw ad-libs at the patrons seated on the aisle, Lester's face remained ever immobile.

The extreme personality contrast was so central to his act that he constructed his dummy, Frank, to show much more expression than he himself exhibited! Since he was the first to do this, [See "The Birth of the Dummy"] it created quite an impression on his audiences. Unfortunately, it was not always a good impression. By giving Frank free reign and staying in the background, he appeared to confirm the mistaken belief that the dummy was his alter ego speaking for him and expressing his repressed hostility. This made him the perfect model for the "crazy ventriloquist" theme, which fed some malicious rumors.

After vaudeville peaked, *Liberty Magazine* published a story, in 1929, written by the celebrated Ben Hecht,[33] entitled, *The Rival Dummy*. A film based on that plot was produced a short while later. The movie, directed by James Cruze, starred Eric Von Stroheim as *The Great Gabbo*. Since, apart from imposters, Lester was the only ventriloquist using "The Great" as part of his name, at the time. [Of course, Frederic The Great Maccabbe had used it earlier.] It was disturbing to him to find his title usurped by a film. Most significantly, many things The Great Gabbo did, The Great Lester was known so well for, or even originated! Unfortunately it included things he never did, for the storyline of the film concerned a disturbed ventriloquist who smashed his dummy in a rage. That was neither accurate nor a positive image. The name Gabbo, with the implication "gabby," was negative, too, although Lester was quite loquacious, which did occasionally cause problems.

Lester, the most recognized ventriloquist at that time, learned of the film and objected to it, claiming, quite accurately, that it reflected badly on his career and reputation. He sued for libel but, unfortunately, the wheels of justice grind slowly. By the time he had won, he would gain nothing because the production company had gone bankrupt! Though the issue appeared to be dead, it was merely lying dormant. His fears about it would come true. Years later, the images on that film would come back to haunt him.

At the height of his fame, Lester dressed immaculately on stage, wearing the latest, expensive fashions. His favorite outfit was white tie and tails, with a high-necked, starched collar which effectively covered any throat movement. Offstage, however, it was an entirely different matter.

When visiting small rural towns, he would dress in the classic "hick" costume: dusty boots, overalls, and a work shirt. He always brought a bicycle along with his props and dummies. Bicycling into town in this getup, he could easily mingle with the natives. As a pool player, he would frequent billiard parlors to hustle games.

Here he would confide in the local sharpies, mimicking their manner of speech. "Say, I hear there's a fellow at the theater with a dummy; real funny. They say he's something different. You oughta' go see him. I hear he's pretty good. Lots of laughs." The men would take the suggestion, visit the theater, look at the elegant gentleman in his finest city slicker clothing and not recognize the scruffy pool hustler who had conned them into coming. But they did laugh.

True to the boast, Lester mesmerized full houses. He could go on for more than an hour and a half, finding it difficult to omit anything from his repertoire. Even offstage he was a most garrulous individual. When vaudeville consisted of two shows a day, running over by a few minutes wasn't too troublesome. As films were in the offing, and vaudeville waned, the live show had to run exactly one hour, so that it could be neatly sandwiched between presentations of the feature motion picture. The time limitation was necessary since it would cost the owner more in overtime pay because of the strict projectionist union contract.

Lester was booked into a theater in Spokane, Washington, where they were attempting to experiment with this combination. He was allowed precisely eighteen minutes for his act, before the movie went on. Lester's reputation as a talker was as well known as the fact that he hailed from Chicago, the Windy City.

The manager, aware of Lester's tendency to run overtime, told him, "You have to cut your act. Stick to the schedule. No more than eighteen minutes!! Don't do overtime. If you do," he threatened, "we're going to cut the lights on you, no matter where you are in your act. We must bring the curtain down on time. I mean it!!"

Lester, needed eighteen minutes just to say "hello" in passing. How could he compress his lifetime's work into a mere eighteen minutes? As you might have guessed, not very well. On opening day the executives of the theater circuit were sitting out front to view the first performance of the new format. At about the eighteen minute mark, Frank Byron was still going strong, with no indication that

Lester was about to stop or walk off while he still had the audience in the grip of his spell. Having given the warning, the manager gave the signal for the screen to descend. Lester, out of the corner of his eye, was aware of what was happening. He continued to hold Frank with one hand, keeping him talking, reached down with the other hand, grabbed his chair, without missing a beat of his routine, and stepped forward as the screen dropped in back of him. The projectionist started the movie, Lester continued talking, but realizing it was a no-win situation, walked off the stage.

Back in the dressing room, Lester was confronted by an irate, red-faced manager, frothing at the mouth, and screaming at the comedy rebel. Loquacious Lester calmly shook his head and, tongue-in-cheek, did what any good ventriloquist would have done under similar circumstances. He blamed his dummy. He told the manager, "Gee whiz...that Frank Byron Jr. sure talks a lot!

A maverick by nature, his success had given him more than just the opportunity to indulge in his practical jokes. It gave him the ability to defy authority at the same time. All theaters had backstage rules. Most prohibited visitations in the dressing rooms. Fraternizing was confined to an area called "The Green Room." This annoyed Lester who always arrived very early, spending several hours in his dressing room to painstakingly prepare his makeup. He liked to talk to friends at this time and often rebelled against the restrictions, much to the dismay of the management, who would later get back at him, as vaudeville faded, by not hiring him.

However eccentric he may sound, one must realize that highly entertaining and unusual ideas do not come from run-of-the-mill types. He had revolutionized the look of the dummy, and, fueled by such an irreverent, singularly offbeat sense of humor, his act was replete with clever stage business. Among his many humorous and novel ideas, he originated the routine of attempting to light a cigarette while the dummy keeps blowing out the match. He was the first we know of to have the figure yodel perfectly. Of course, he invented the telephone voice and did three distinct phone voices conversing with each other. (See "Heaven and Hell" above) Lester claimed to have originated the bit of drinking a glass of water while the dummy talks or hums, and he surely believed it, but it had been done before. However, he popularized it to such a degree that he is well remembered for it, and deservedly so. His one television appearance was to do that bit specifically. It was commonly believed that instead of plain water he added coloring to make it more visible in the bright light. Thus, with the coloring, it looked like he drank wine. While he did use a dark liquid, it was not actually merely water and coloring, as has been so often stated. The letter below explains. However, the drinking bit was why he had a table with a decanter and a glass. It was a quick, memorable, applause-getting grand finale to his very famous routine. He also poured it in plain view of the audience to rule out a trick glass, which some ventriloquists did use. However he did not need one because he was an expert at the ruse. Here is the routine, along with some secrets, from a handwritten letter from E. Eadah, Lester's third wife. Some of it sounds like dictation, some like reporting. [Slightly edited to improve readability]

Drinking Bit

Have glass decanter filled with Coke. Let Coke stand for about
one-half hour before using to get rid of gas.
Business: Pick up glass and look at it. Place back on table
(Have figure watch all your movements) Remove stopper from decanter.
Pick up decanter and, as you go to pour liquid into glass, figure speaks.
Figure: What are you going to do?
Vent: I am going to "hawve" a drink (pronounce the word "have"
the same way an Englishman would)
Figure: Thanks. I'll have the other hawve (half)
Vent: Quiet. (Pours liquid into glass. Figure watches all action.
Vent picks up glass and places to lips.)
Figure: Well, I wish you luck.
Vent: (Removes glass from lips) Thank you.
Figure: I hope you choke.
Vent: That's very kind of you. (places glass to lips.)
Figure: Hey.
Vent: Now what?
Figure: I'll tell you what I'll do.
Vent: And what will you do?
Figure: While you are drinking that cold tea I will make
a noise like this. Grrrrr.
(Figure makes a deep grunt like a fog horn or siren. Mouth wide open)
Vent: Go ahead.
Figure: Ok. Here goes. (Grunt)
Vent: (Drinks contents of glass while figure grunts. When glass is
empty figure stops grunting, looks at glass and then at ventriloquist)
Figure: Now you grunt and I'll drink.

From then on I go into set dialogue.
Then sing song.

Arthur Prince's drinking stunt is almost the same, only as the vent drinks, the figure says "going, going, going" and as the vent finishes the drinking the figure says "gone."

Lester had the figure sing a ballad *Down The Long Trail To Home Sweet Home*.
He carried the figure down into the audience during the song.

Well, that letter clears up some of the questions. The drinking bit also once resulted in an extraordinary standing ovation. Here is what happened in Chicago, in 1925. At that time, in vaudeville, acts usually played a week in a town and then would head off to the next city on Sunday, since so-called blue laws prohibited shows on that day. In that era, it was common for some performers to play pranks on the stagehands and orchestra members during the week. Payback usually came on Friday night. Lester had a reputation as a prankster and, while we don't know exactly what

he did to the crew, he must have done something, because he was considered fair game. Instead of the usual flat coke à la wine he expected, the musicians at the Balaban and Katz Theatre decided to play a trick on the trickster. They chose the finale drinking bit as the perfect gag and substituted full-strength whiskey in the wine decanter. Lester innocently drained the glass during the climax of the act, while the musicians waited expectantly for him to explode in a storm of coughing. But, according to Silent Mora, a Boston magician who was in the audience: "Not a muscle moved in Lester's face, but the dummy almost choked to death. All forty members of the orchestra arose from their chairs and applauded a great piece of showmanship. The audience sensed something unusual and applauded too."[34]

Because he always poured the "wine" into his glass to show that it was real liquid and that he was actually drinking it, rather than just using a trick glass, it is possible that he noticed something was different and was a bit more prepared than he appeared to be. He did not confide it to me. Nevertheless, he was a showman, and a self-contained one at that, which both made him great, as well as contributing to his undoing.

Click here to see Lester Look-alike acts
(Not imposters who used his name, just the look of the famous act)

Unfortunately, Lester's "bare bones" set-up made it seem easy and inexpensive to imitate, requiring just a figure, table, decanter, glass and telephone. Even my early act looked a bit like his, as seen in my first photo. [See "Speaking for Myself"] Copyists toured America with an inferior version of his act. This became a major problem when he was out of the country. During his absence, American theater managers had hired the imposters who usurped his name, or copyists who simply had an act that looked like his. After he returned from a successful tour abroad, many managers no longer wanted the original, since it was "similar to an act we just had." With the American scene changing, movies moving in, vaudeville vanishing, and less work available for everybody, Lester slowly faded from stardom and eventually retired to Rhinelander, Wisconsin, where he led a quiet life out of the spotlight, for several years, until a writeup in a newspaper changed that.

In 1937, Ed[ward] [Vincent] Sullivan, who was a fledgling columnist, saw Edgar Bergen performing at the prestigious Rainbow Room in New York City. He recalled The Great Lester, and his act. In his column he noted that Lester had gone mad and was committed to an institution. Perhaps the haunting ghost of movies past caused him to confuse the fiction of *The Great Gabbo* with the reality of The Great Lester. [See "Fact, Fiction and Film"] Some say that he did not recall the act, but that someone else pointed out what *they* had remembered, erroneously, and Sullivan did not bother to check it out. That can happen with deadlines staring back at you. Neverthe less, he is the one who put it in print and he made a major faux pas, a habit he continued when he hosted his television show. Here is what he wrote in the New York *Daily News* of Wednesday, January 6, 1937 (p.46) All the punctuation is original, he used his own distinctive staccato style which looked a bit like a telegram, and was used to connect a "stream of consciousness" series of thoughts and chatter.

Broadway
By Ed Sullivan

Broadway Looking Glass

At the Rainbow Room, Cardini, greatest of card tricksters, watches Edgar Bergen manipulate his dummy, Charlie. . . Every time I see one of these ventriloquists, I think of the most famous of them all. . . He used a certain dummy figure for years, finally becoming convinced that the dummy, instead of being inanimate, was really alive. . . Performers used to hear the ventriloquist bitterly abusing the dummy in his dressing room, claiming that he was laying down in the act. . . A few months later, the ventriloquist went violently insane, tore the dummy to pieces, was committed to the insane asylum.. That was The Great Lester, one of the higher priced vaudeville acts. . .[End of segment.]

The famous Rainbow Room, at 30 Rockefeller Center, is still in business.

Billy Jackson, Lester's former agent, spotted the column with the calumny and called it to Lester's attention. Lester may have been out of sight, but he was definitely *not* out of his mind. He was quite angry and not at all amused. He threatened to sue. Young Sullivan apologized, explaining that this was the start of his career and that a legal suit would hurt him professionally and financially. He suggested that, if Lester withdrew his suit, he would help book him and give him reams of publicity. Lester, remembered his previous suit against the film where he won but gained nothing, and agreed. Sullivan kept his word, mentioning Lester favorably in his columns, and arranging a booking at the Wivel, a Swedish restaurant and showroom just west of Broadway.[Shari Lewis would appear there too, nearly twenty years later.]

Lester at the Wivel

Though Sullivan was right about Lester being one of the "higher priced vaudeville acts" that was in a different era. He now appeared sporadically in some small rooms locally. His only TV appearance was on the *You Asked For It* television show hosted by Art Baker, where the viewers requested to see unusual things. Lester was asked to do his drinking bit. He had updated his look, by using a new dummy, one of a few he called Broadway Eddie. Frank Byron Jr. remained retired. Though Lester's career never took off again, he never fully left the field either. Now that the incident with Sullivan had brought him out of retirement, he spent his last few years in Hollywood, California, teaching his craft, until his death at the age of 77, on July 14, 1956. Even during his heyday he shared his knowledge, experience, and wisdom. I am fortunate to have been one of his students as well as one of his friends.

Lester and one "Broadway Eddie"

This brings to mind another student and friend, and their first meeting when Lester was at the top, headlining at the Victoria Theater in Chicago. Watching Lester in show after show was an assertive young usher working his way through school. He was also an aspiring, admiring ventriloquist. With a little dummy under his arm, he went backstage to meet the master. “My name is Edgar Bergren,” [later, Bergen] he said. “I want to be a ventriloquist.” Lester was impressed with the young man’s spunk and forthright approach. He was also flattered that he wanted to learn from the star whose performance he studied show after show. It was evident the youth was sincere and shared the same love of the art. Lester agreed to coach him, giving him some sound advice and practical suggestions. Remembering his own struggles, and the kindness of others, Lester refused to charge Bergen. How could he know that this student would one day bring the art to new heights in a new medium, or become his friend and patron? Lester’s life was a perfect example of that saying, “what goes round, comes round;” both the petty pranks and the largess.

Though copyists eventually helped to put The Great Lester out of business, there was a great demand for comedy satirists at the height of the Golden Age. Established ventriloquial vaudeville acts were quite popular and therefore made good targets for the type of artist who would do clever spoofs or ‘put-on’ acts. Their gimmick was creating living caricatures by distorting the distinctive styles, techniques, and routines of famous acts in particular, or a style in general. Although Alexandre, and later, Lester among others did the now classic “drinking-a-glass-of-water” for real, that was one bit of business that begged to be lampooned. It was. There were spoofers who clumsily sang and dribbled all over themselves, those who pretended to get drunk on the wine, and one who literally gargled the chorus of a song. One impromptu version... we’ll let Angela Martin tell it herself.[Letter to the author, 6/7/78]:

> While performing live on the Jackie Gleason Variety T.V. show in the 50’s during the show after my act— Mr. Gleason decided to ad-lib a comedy bit and called for my “Tiny.” While I stood in the wings breathless and excited Jackie called for a glass of milk and proceeded to use the milk and Tiny for a laugh. My face must have looked like a cartoon sketch as my eyes widened and a look of panic set in — “what if he pours the milk into Tiny’s mouth — my goodness... Fortunately Mr. Gleason finished with a grand finale of drinking the milk and spurting some out as he tried some ventriloquisting.. (It got a big laugh and boy was I relieved)

It was live, it was impromptu, and it went out over the airwaves just like that. Like Gleason, who was a star and did not need to ride the coattails of a ventriloquist, others saw the humor possibilities too. Of course, many supposed vents used dummies in sight gags, especially where they would fall apart as they were being ineptly manipulated. Arms and legs would drop to the floor. Sometimes the figure’s head would pop out of the body while berating the “vent” for his lack of talent as he

tried to locate the scattered body parts. The hapless "vent" attempted to repair the damage in full view of the audience as if nothing were wrong. As legs were shoved into arm sockets or left legs forced into right armholes, or an arm would pop out of the neck hole by mistake, the audience would roar at the clumsy undertakings.

American vent Criss Cross had a cabaret act with a life-sized, overly buxom figure attired in a very low-cut dress. It added an amusing touch of the risquè which shook up the crowd. As "she" took her bow, the unsuspecting viewers suddenly gasped and howled as one of "her" breasts "accidentally" popped out.

Criss Cross and friends.

Seeing is believing, so the saying goes. Not so with this act and its bombshell ending that audiences kept secret. William Ebbs brought his dummy on stage in a suitcase, pulled out his partner and did a fine ventriloquial presentation. At its conclusion, the "dummy" leaped from his knee and raced off the stage, taking the audience by surprise.

The "figure" was his brother, a little person or midget, as they were called then, made up to look like a wooden figure. Remaining expressionless, with staring eyes, and moving in a stiff, mechanical manner, he fooled the audience into believing he was a real dummy, which helped William Ebbs deceive his audience into believing he was a real ventriloquist!

In another version of his act, Ebbs and his dummy (a real one) sat in a chair next to a table on which there was a large wicker lamp. He projected amazing ventriloquial feats, effortlessly drinking wine, eating apples, and smoking a cigar while the dummy appeared to sing and speak distinctly. At the conclusion, he pulled the chain to turn off the light. Suddenly the midget, who was concealed in the oversized wicker lamp, tumbled out and ran off, revealing the "lamp-oon" of his fake "ventriloquial prowess."

Then there was the act with one of the "brothers Marx," before they were the famous "Marx Brothers." Their mom's brother, Uncle Al Shean had become a successful vaudevillian, in the famous team of Gallagher and Shean, a partnership formed in 1906. They gained fame and reached the heights in the early 1920's, at which time they became widely imitated, even in comic strips. There also was an evening radio show called "Gallagher and Shean" on WEAF, in New York City around 1935. However, the original Gallagher had passed away in 1929. You might not know of them, but one of their bits was used in the late 1980s by a large impersonal corporation for an extensive advertising campaign, to personalize the company, or at least its founders and namesakes. Gallagher and Shean's memorable little refrain or tag to their bits was a ditty that went in a syllable-by-syllable staccato (except that "Gallagher" is sung quickly) singsong, up for the question, "Ab-so-lute-ly Mis-ter Gallagher? "Pos-i-tive-ly Mis-ter Shean" The ad of sixty or so years later had a duo who extolled the virtues of their mailroom products with the mimicked, yet affirmative, tag-line "Ab-so-lute-ly Mis-ter Pitney!, Pos-i-tive-ly Mis-ter Bowes!"

Which shows that some of their material, like that of many vaudevillians, was an endearing and enduring comedy commodity. Clearly, the success of that bit did not go unnoticed by the ad agency as Uncle Al Shean's success had not gone unnoticed by another uncle of the Brothers Marx, either Harry or Henry, (there is some question here). To break into the lucrative field of vaudeville, he needed some clever and entertaining skill, which he did not possess. He decided to do a ventriloquist act.

However, since he was not one, he devised a fake ventriloquist act that he would pass off as real — more of a con job than a cod act. If only he could get someone to play the dummy. Enter nephew Milton "Gummo" Marx, the fifth son born to Minnie (Shean) and Sam Marx, in 1894. Even many of their fans hardly remember him, because he quit the "act" before their fame on the Great White Way, and this is the reason. Though he was the youngest, he actually started performing before his older brothers. Perhaps it was his size that encouraged his Uncle to recruit him for his new act. All he needed to do was fit little Gummo up with a full head mask, dress him to look just like a dummy and sit him on his knee to give punch lines to the jokes. Since this would make Uncle H. look like a perfect ventriloquist, he thought it might be a nice touch if he could "prove" to the audience that the figure sitting on his knee was a real dummy, a line Groucho would not have let pass. The plan was to have Gummo put both his legs into one leg of the dummy's pants so that his uncle could jab a long hat pin into the other, stuffed, leg. His ingenious Uncle figured he had a winner here. Ingenuous Gummo went along. As you might imagine, or have guessed, there were a few problems. His uncle was actually hard of hearing and, with the full head mask on, so was Gummo! There was no way they could keep the dialogue in sync. Why this did not show up in a rehearsal is anybody's guess, but, just like the Titanic would years later, it was the tip of the iceberg on the act's maiden voyage — to the bottom of the barrel.

Even though you know in advance that it was doomed, it is like the brothers' famous movies; you want to see it unfold. The night of their ill-fated debut, the audience saw nothing funny in the act and soon caught on to the fraud, loudly letting it be known that they knew. He lost what little composure he had and in his haste to jab the dummy to prove that it was real, missed, skewering his unsuspecting nephew instead. Gummo's reflexes took over. He leaped off the lap, jumping around while bellowing in pain. When the crowd got really ugly, his uncle felt that as a performer *on* the stage, he was better *off*. So did Gummo, who never would feel comfortable when on stage. His uncle scooped up his nephew and retreated. For good!

If it weren't so unfortunate, it would be funny. In fact, compared to the other "cod" acts, it would appear that had they only **not** tried to play it straight, they would have had a long, unforgettable career, rather than a long forgotten one, as a farcical act worthy of the name Marx.

Audiences like to be fooled, not duped, and there is a narrow line there, like carrying a joke too far. (Which did happen to Bergen, and is in "The Charlie Awards.") It was not illegal to do a fake act using a little man or child in place of a

dummy, nor to employ assistants, when needed. It was good show business when done right. For example, Fred Russell devised and patented a method that allowed an assistant to insert their arm through a curtain to make a dummy more alive. In certain films Edgar Bergen hired a stand-in, a "little person" named Jerry Maren (real name Jerry Marenghi) to perform physical stunts. Paul Winchell gave Jerry Mahoney and Knucklehead Smiff human arms and hands, from assistants hidden behind scenery, so that they could gesture, hold and manipulate objects during their skits. [See "..To TV"] Of course, at times, ventriloquists used remote control methods and also had off-camera assistants move the mouth so that they could perform their ventriloquism from a distance, when required.

Gaby, Kay Stewart and Jerry Hausner

Frank Gaby engaged a little person, Billy Curtis, not as a dummy but as his stage assistant, in a classic sight gag. Gaby presented many acts in vaudeville in the early 1940s, with beautiful Kay Stewart, whom he later married. One included Curtis and a stooge, Jerry Hausner, a successful actor in his own right, who would heckle Gaby from a box seat above the stage. Heckling from the box seats was a common ploy in vaudeville, and was later successfully used on Jim Henson's *The Muppet Show*, with two curmudgeonly puppet hecklers Statler and Waldorf, named after hotel tycoons, or more likely, their famous "twin" hotels in New York City. Gaby used all the ploys he could, including a "midget" and a stooge. While old humor by now now, here is Jerry Hausner, as the stooge, heckling Gaby, on the stage.

Lucy's neighbors, Fred and Ethel, did not appear in the first TV episode of *I Love Lucy*. **Jerry Hausner** played Ricky's agent in that episode and remained in the supporting cast from 1951-1954.
He also appeared on The Dick Van Dyke Show, among others and in movies. He died in 1993 at age 83.

Stooge:	"Get off! You're a bum!"
Gaby:	"I happen to be in the cinema."
Stooge:	"Yeah, you're a cinema bum!"
Gaby:	"If you're not quiet, I'll have the manager take you out."
Stooge:	"Sorry... I don't go out with strange men."
Gaby:	"If I was your father, I'd put poison in your coffee."
Stooge:	"If you were my father... I'd drink it!"
Gaby:	"How did you get in here?"
Stooge:	"On my friend's ticket."
Gaby:	"Where is your friend?"
Stooge:	"Outside, looking for his ticket."

Gaby then called off stage, "Bring on the dummy." Out came the little man carrying the figure, which was almost twice his size. The sight of a tiny man struggling with the large doll was very funny. Gaby announced... "And now, an imitation of an old time ventriloquist."

Gaby with the
ill-fated dummy.

At first the dummy remained mute. Gaby then shook the figure, repeating the announcement. The dummy suddenly screeched, “I feel good!” causing the vent to do a startled double take. Seemingly frightened, he threw the doll in the air and ran away. The head and body of the dummy separated as they fell and landed on the floor, a few feet apart. A big, black rubber bulb dangled from the neck. Picking up the head, Gaby pushed the bulb into place as he told it, “Wait a minute until I put your goiter back in.” When the dummy was reassembled, it suddenly began to cry, squirting liquid from its eye which hit Gaby in the face, dribbling into his mouth. Tasting the substance, Gaby reported, “Hmm... Vanilla.” Gaby then called off stage, “Come and get him.” Then Curtis returned to struggle once again, teetering off the stage together. At this point, the stooge from the box seat came on stage, supposedly to touch-up Gaby’s messy make-up. The stooge hit him in the face with a loaded powder puff, sending up a cloud of dust, and asked Gaby for permission to sing for the people. Gaby gave the go ahead.

While cleaning the excess powder off Gaby’s face, the stooge sang *Wagon Wheels*, a popular ballad back then. When the stooge was finished and walked off stage, the audience still heard the song! Only then did they realize that it had been Gaby doing the singing all the while!

Sure it all sounds campy and corny today. It was then too. It was the look and the timing and the times that made it work. If some of the jokes sound old, it’s because they are, now. Some were old then, some fresh and clever, and have become old over time. Many of today’s top comedies, movies and television shows follow the same counsel: “You had to be there.” Those who were, loved it.

As sometimes happens with multi-talented people, Frank Gaby’s life was one of frustration and depression because he preferred acting to ventriloquy. For example, he played Jim Marble in Phillip Barry’s Broadway play, *Here Come The Clowns*. On February 13, 1945, en route to Oklahoma to join a USO tour as a ventriloquist, he checked into the Manhattan Hotel in St. Louis. Sadly, he ended a brilliant career there by hanging himself from a clothes hook with a necktie.

Excerpt from the Oxford English Dictionary Second Edition:
[Emphasis added]

cod, v.3 slang or dial. perh. f. cod sb.5 in sense `fool'. trans. `**To hoax,** to take a "rise" out of' (Slang Dict. 1873); to humbug, impose upon. Also intr., to **play a joke, to `kid', to sham; to burlesque** (see also quot. 1933). So codding 'codding vbl. sb.

1884 Cheshire Gloss., Coddin, humbugging. `Tha'st only coddin me as tha allus does; tha'l none tay me to see th' fair.'

1933 P. Godfrey Back-Stage iii. 39 `Codding' is the reprehensible habit of joking privately when on the stage.

1933 P. Godfrey Back-Stage 40 One famous actress is notorious for `codding'. Her favourite device is to talk in a **ventriloquial** whisper throughout the speeches of the other actors... ‘Codding' can also be done by gesture.

1941 J. Cary House of Children 21 Harry murmured to me: `Look out for something-he's codding us.' In fact, we had often had practical jokes played on us.

Gaby was unusual because he was both an accomplished vent and vent spoofer. While some spoof acts crossed the ocean to perform in England, that did not mean America was the only country to have counterfeit ventriloquists. England had their own put-on vents known as “cod” performers. Cod was commonly used to mean hoax. [See box, previous page]

Cod performers were comedians who discovered that mis-copying can be lucrative. One of the funniest cod performers I’ve ever seen was Sandy Powell who appeared to be an inept, pompous older man. He and his nondescript dummy wore matching flashy red military outfits. Powell wore an obviously false, scraggly mustache which was supposed to look like it hid his moving lips. It didn’t. My recollections are a bit different than those of Val Andrews. We were impressed by different aspects.

Sandy Powell

Powell’s act was a collection of bumbling errors. He used the same voice for both himself and his dummy. Under the dangling mustache, his lips moved ridiculously. All the while, Powell seemed oblivious to his hilarious ineptitude, which was capped by the line, “I’ve got to get a bigger mustache.” Surely, The Great Maccabe, and the mustachioed G. W. Jester, would have howled at this man’s tongue-in-cheek act. Or perhaps not. It is difficult to compare across time and place.

Canfield Smith made audiences laugh with his standard figure whose arm would drop off in the middle of a routine, with Smith seemingly indifferent to his companion’s plight. The dummy finally complained, “Hey! Canfield... There’s a draft in here. Is there a carpenter in the house?” He “played the Palace,” as well as club dates after vaudeville.

The cod performers, or put-on artists, earned their place in the annals of stardom by riding on the coattails of the well-known acts who rose to the top during the Golden Age. Some single acts, like Lester, made it big on their own. However, success sometimes only came to some after they teamed up with someone of the opposite sex. Just as some comedy and singing acts were duos in vaudeville’s glory days, ventriloquism also had man/woman comedy teams. More about them will be found in the next chapter, “Women and Ventriloquism.” One well-known twosome never argued about who got top billing.

Vox and Walters with Buttons

“Walters and Walters” presented their sketch on a park bench, which featured a lady and her crying baby. “Walters and Walters” eventually divorced and Emily, joined up with Wilfred Moran who was performing as a single using the name Valentine Vox. At the start of his career, he presented a clever and charming little sketch called

The Club Man, which took place in a businessman's club. Vox entered and approached a bellhop called "Buttons," who was asleep in a chair, his face covered with newspapers. Vox and Buttons discussed current conditions and various members of the club. It concluded with Buttons falling asleep again and Vox stuffing a dollar bill into his pocket. When Vox joined Emily Walters, their partnership as "Vox and Walters," went on to huge success.

Johnnie Woods and his partner, Little Henry, also performed in the vaudeville era. Woods, a dapper gentleman, was one of only a handful of Black ventriloquists. In one of his acts he appeared in a restaurant scene with his wooden companion where they had a conversation over dinner.

Brooklyn-born Marshall Montgomery, a widely known ventriloquist, performed in theaters with a clever dining bit, too. He would drink from a glass, and slice and eat a sausage, while he and his dummy conversed. but he is best known for featuring a replica of the most recognized bellhop of 1935. It was based upon a famous real-live midget bellhop "Johnny," who became the familiar trademark of Phillip Morris cigarettes. While this is no endorsement of the product, it does have a bearing on the commercial value of the art and the many ways it has been utilized in our society.

Marshall Montgomery

During a nationwide promotion, people would come face-to-face with Johnny [John Roventini, the Philip Morris pageboy] everyday, in his crisp uniform, as cardboard cutouts of him stood in display windows everywhere. The nation's radio listeners were also quite familiar with his background theme, *On the Trail*, by Ferde Grofe, followed by the announcement, which would be echoed years later for an even more famous ventriloquist and magician turned talk show host, "Heere's Johnny... stepping out of thousands of store windows." Finally, that unforgettable, distinctive alto sound of elongated vowels, "Caaall for Phiiillip Moorrace!" which was unforgettable to that generation. The promotional tours for the tobacco company, and his superb theatrical performances, gave him the wide public recognition he deserved, decades before anything was revealed about their machinations and the dangers of tobacco.

When he teamed up with ventriloquist Lucille De Haven he gained even wider renown. They appeared in a dating vignette set in the lady's living-room. It was a frustrating, romantic situation; all they wanted was a little privacy. Her bratty kid brother, played by the dummy, kept interrupting. Montgomery, unable to get rid of him, finally resorts to bribery. "I'll give you a quarter to go to the movies." The boy countered, "I'll give you fifty cents to let me stay and watch." [What prices!]

Among those who nursed the precocious Charlie along was the delightful Lucille Ball (born Dianne Belmont) long before her *I Love Lucy* triumphs on television.

A fresh or naughty little kid figure was used at some point in almost everyone's career to convulse the crowds. Some figures made it big; most did not. The one who made it biggest, the all-time leader of the dummy Brat Pack, was the brash, brilliant Charlie McCarthy. That sophisticated, impertinent imp helped rocket Edgar Bergen to stardom, earning him more money than any ventriloquist before or since. In his early vaudeville days Bergen presented a charming two-scene routine called *The Operation*, which he revived for appearances in Las Vegas, on television, and in the movies.

In the first scene, Bergen, playing a doctor, discovers a despondent Charlie on a park bench. Questioning him, "Dr. Bergen" learns that Charlie is ill and needs surgery. The scene now shifts to the operating room where Dr. Bergen is dressed in hospital garb and poor Charlie is on the operating table. In fear of his life and shaking like a leaf., Charlie has been dictating his will. "...and I leave my bicycle to Skinny Dugan..." The laughs mount as a beautiful nurse enters to assist the doctor. The "patient," flirts outrageously with her. Whenever Dr. Bergen indicates a problem, Charlie would sigh, "I can just see Skinny riding my bicycle."

Ventriloquism would soon face its next evolutionary step from a conjuror's device to deceive and frighten the superstitious to a widely recognized and highly regarded performance art until vaudeville faded away, just as the field of film was silently developing. Not so silent was radio, which attracted large audiences, keeping them from the vaudeville theater, to stay at home where they could listen for free, especially during the Great Depression of 1929 and later. Jobs and money were scarce. Vocal illusionists, mesmerizing their audiences, were still in demand. But some felt that the final curtain was descending. Both the proscenium arch and the ventriloquist's art might perish. It was hard to believe that it could happen but eventually the final curtain did come down on the Golden Age, along with the gilded frame in which the vocal illusions had been exhibited.

However, you can take heart. Constant innovation led to ventriloquism's rise in popularity, and also to its salvation. When the Golden Age waned many performers found some work in the supper clubs and later, in the new booming resorts. Las Vegas was one of them. One fellow became well known there, headlining as a feature act on several Las Vegas revue shows. Earl Henry Estenson was born in Minneapolis. Like so many others, he too was

One thing that helped vaudeville originally was the move to the cities. What hurt it was the move out of the cities, and what fueled that move were the steady advancements in the design of the automobile from its invention in 1895. As if radio and the movies were not enough competition, the 1920's brought the invention of the electric starter and closed body, which greatly increased the attraction of the car, and vaudeville felt it. With the car's new comfort, freedom, and pricing, even average people no longer felt confined to the public transportation routes or schedules within or just outside the city. So, many moved to the suburbs. Those who did not move their residences there sought more diversion outside the city limits. This was yet another factor in the rapid decline of the golden age of vaudeville and the equally rapid rise of the golden age of the automobile.

inspired by Bergen on radio and eventually performed in some supper clubs. He is better known as Dick Weston, (1926-1996) and with his cohorts, saucy Aunt Martha and tipsy Clarence, he lit up the stages with his skill and wit, while his name went up in lights all around Las Vegas. He performed for years there, sometimes for more than a year at one hotel. When he retired, he took up painting in the neo-impressionist style and his works were spotlighted at the Las Vegas Art Museum in "The Puppets and Pointillism of Dick Weston" in 1997. It was a well deserved tribute to a splendid performer, who, for many years, showed the public the best of our art.

Times were changing and these places created new demands for ventriloquists who needed to update the appeal of the art and lengthen its life span. The most important venue would be a novel electronic window that offered the most exciting possibilities to the practitioners of this most ancient, amusing and intriguing art. Fortunately, these and other new venues also opened up for many former vaudeville performers, including ventriloquists, both male and female. Speaking of females, did you happen to notice that few women ventriloquists have been mentioned? That's because their contributions were so varied and great, they deserve to be spotlighted in their own chapter!

Lester Marshall, Jr. who's father created his name from two of his idols, The Great Lester and Frank Marshall, like many others after the Golden Age, performed for organizations and special events, some television shows, and fairs, among other venues.

Chapter VIII

Women and Ventriloquism

Undoubtedly the word “ventriloquist” evokes the classic image of a man with a dummy, usually on the knee. If you, or a friend, were asked to name one, you might recall, depending upon one’s age, Edgar Bergen, Paul Winchell, Jimmy Nelson, Señor Wences, or perhaps Jay Johnson, Ronn Lucas or Jeff Dunham. Then again, how many names of women, or even men, in the previous chapter rang a bell? If you are typical, few or none. That is because there were always fewer women and they were always less well known. And while there have been outstanding artists of both sexes in the past, there were never large numbers at any one time

Therefore it is not so much being chauvinistic, as much as simply a way of thinking which is more of a conditioned reflex caused by a centuries old tradition of associating it with somewhat more prominent male performers, in a comparatively obscure art. Why there were fewer female practitioners is not clear. Surely, this is partly a reflection of society in general, where opportunities for women were limited. That has changed and now the art has been taken up by many women. *New Yorker* magazine covered an exhibit of photography by Ms. Laurie Simmons which featured twenty-five female ventriloquists, but most of them are not well known, certainly not as well known as one woman who is now known to many, and who goes back a “few” years. Her mother was a music coordinator for the New York City schools. I was a friend of her father, Dr. Abraham B. Hurwitz, the director of Recreation for Yeshiva University, who called himself “Peter Pan The Magic Man.” He worked for the New York City Parks Department, and in 1930, when Mayor La Guardia recognized the value of magic as a hobby for youngsters, he wanted an “Official Magician of the City of New York.” He chose “Doc” for the position. “Doc” eventually formed a teenage magic club called Future American Magical Entertainers [FAME], which lasted until the 1970's, and had many notable graduates. From time to time “Doc” would invite fellow entertainers, friends, and business associates to his apartment for an evening of shop talk and fun. We would usually get around to doing impromptu “bits” for each other, which he would carefully take note of for future use.

At one such gathering I had brought my old “dummy” Willie with me and we bantered with the crowd. Doc’s seven year old daughter, Phyllis, was awakened by the laughter. She came out of her bedroom in her nightclothes, stood beside me,

rubbed her eyes and stared at talkative Willie on my knee. Willie greeted her. Without hesitation, and ignoring me completely, she continued the conversation with her new friend as she climbed up on my **other** knee. I looked like a silent middleman operating two dolls! Many thought it had been rehearsed, because she was so at ease. That ease with people and puppets brought Phyllis Hurwitz fame and fortune.

Along the way, she received hints and instructions from several mentors. One of the grand old masters — John Cooper, the venerated ventriloquist of minstrel and vaudeville days, coached her. He was in his eighties at the time! Cooper also inspired Dick Bruno, who happened to catch his act in a nightclub. Bruno took up the art and worked at it successfully. He later portrayed the debonaire Monsieur Brunard, a refined Frenchman, who spoke English with a convincing French accent. He performed with his partner-in-contrast, Joe Flip, who fraternized with an authentic Brooklyn accent, since Dick Bruno was born and raised in that borough of New York City. Monsieur Brunard was born and reborn regularly over the years, for each show, but one day, in 1947, Dick **became** Monsieur Brunard, by deciding not to change back. Thereafter, he remained in character at all times, playing the top spots, until he retired from the stage. He could easily have been included in "The Golden Age," because he was a popular and proficient professional who appeared in the major venues. But, given all that, I believe his greatest and most lasting contribution to, and influence upon, our art was through one of his pupils. He met her when she was booked at a trendy French nightclub called Bal Tabarin on West 46th Street in Manhattan. As good as she was, she was not good enough and the management was not happy. Her contract was canceled, but they saw her potential and suggested she look in on "Monsieur Brunard and Joe Flip," playing eight blocks north, at the Wivel, the Swedish restaurant where The Great Lester had come out of retirement many years before. This talented young lady and her manager, Helen Kramer, were taken by what they saw and engaged Dick Bruno to coach her intensely for a month, three times a week. He assisted her in honing her craft and helped book shows, in the crucial early years. From time to time, I loaned her some valuable books on the subject and taught her some technical tricks. I even converted her male dummy into a female! Hmm.. that doesn't sound right. It required attaching a wig and applying makeup. Puppeteer Nat Norbert was a friend whose shows she watched over and over when she was a youngster tagging along with her dad, who hired him for recreation programs. Nat introduced her to a woman he knew, who made sock puppets, which eventually led to her famous hand puppets, starting with the first and most lovable of them all, winsome "Lamb Chop." Later, "Charlie Horse" and "Hush Puppy"joined the menagerie and she even had her own television shows, of course.

Believable faux Frenchman and flippant friend

Over the years, she performed in theaters and nightclubs around the world. Today, "Doc's" little girl is known as Shari Lewis. Her father always called her Shari, which is Yiddish for pretty.

One of her most memorable appearances took place in England. Having achieved stardom, she was asked to give a Command Performance at the London Palladium. Afterward, Princess Anne asked Shari how she chose ventriloquism, a field she considered highly unusual for a woman. Shari informed the Princess that her father was a magician who had puppets and magic tricks around the house. It seemed the natural thing to do. Princess Anne nodded understandingly and replied, "Yes, one does tend to become involved in one's family profession."

The indefatigable Shari Lewis makes numerous contributions to the art by presenting informative, nonviolent, wholesome television programs for children. She has appeared before congressional committees advocating family-oriented TV shows.

While being a female ventriloquist *was* unusual, it was not unheard of. Before Shari Lewis, and during the Golden Age of Vaudeville, there were several female ventriloquists, some of whom were mentioned in the last chapter and some who will be given the spotlight shortly. In earlier times there were others too, but *they* worked covertly and would not have sought the spotlight. The very first female to be identified as a ventriloquist, of whom we have written information, was the Bible's Witch of Endor. We can only identify two other women in ancient times. Surely there were many more female seers, oracles and fortune tellers secretly using the art. Unfortunately, the climate of fear, the aura of mystery, limited documentation in times past, and loss of such accounts over the centuries, permit us only a glimpse of these two.

The first was known only as Cecilia, a poor soul who plied her "trade" around 1550 in Lisbon, Portugal. She astounded her audience by discussing unearthly matters with a spirit she called "Pierre Jean," whose voice seemed to emanate from various parts of her body. At the end of the session "Pierre Jean" would request contributions to help support poor Cecilia. The local populous, both fearful and superstitious, accused her of being a sorceress. The talkative lady was brought before a tribunal and convicted of being possessed by demons. She was exiled and later died in poverty.

Barbara Jacobi was an elderly resident of Haarlem, Holland in 1685. She resided in a public facility, an early version of a nursing home. Perhaps a combination of loneliness and senility caused her to create an imaginary friend, as children still do. She named him "Joachim."

As people eavesdropped, Barbara and "Joachim" chatted about local happenings and general gossip. Everyone assumed there was an actual person hidden in the room, but it fascinated and amused curious visitors. We have no way of knowing how good her technique was. Perhaps she wore a shawl, which helped to conceal her face and neck. No one suspected her of supplying the other voice. Encouraged by the shocked reactions she received, their chats became more spicy and libelous. She would ask

"Joachim" intimate questions about local people and receive startling replies. This was a pre-radio/TV "soap opera," with a twist. She was considered highly amusing until her revelations, or fabrications, began to embarrass the gentry. To put an end to their vexations, the outraged citizens searched her bed and room in an attempt to locate "Joachim," her supposed accomplice. Since they could not find him, they naturally assumed that she was a witch. In self defense, she "retired" her friend.

Though hampered by superstition and religious persecution, women continued to utilize their ventriloquial skills, albeit covertly. As the centuries wore on and the stigma wore off, the secret vocal deception gradually emerged as less of an artifice and more of an art form. European, and later American, female artists began to appear in vaudeville and in concert halls. Although we are unable to find any who became "superstars" the following mentions comprise some of the professional women whose names have come down to us, or whose pictures have survived. Once the "dummy" came into regular use, ventriloquists of both sexes were known to perform while seated, with a figure on their lap or a stand or table. It also became fairly common for male ventriloquists to use a chair to rest their raised leg while the figure sat upon their thigh. Female ventriloquists often used figures designed to stand, and/or stands upon which their figures sat, which the picture on the right, of an unknown female ventriloquist, clearly depicts. One modern woman came up with a unique solution to the problem of using and switching figures during the act by using a lazysuzan and even patented it. (Click to see part of it.)

Unknown

Louise Hudson

Among the "foremothers" of today's vocal manipulators, let us not forget Grace De Winter, a clever English ventriloquist and impersonator who achieved stardom during England's Music Hall era. Another, using a military theme, a Miss De Bussey by name, worked two dummies; a soldier who wore a uniform of the first World War, and a young boy. Then there was Louise Hudson who chatted with a life-size walking man character. Another performer, May Tenney, got laughs with a Black figure carved at Charlie (Mac) Mack's shop.

Newspaper clippings, show that after its debut as pure entertainment, ventriloquism flourished around the world. Spain was kept laughing, in the early twentieth century by the beautiful Rose Baron. She and her male manikin partner conversed in her native tongue.

Marie Greer McDonald does not seem to have left her mark as an entertainer, but she certainly left an imprint as an entrepreneur. In the late 1920s she opened the "Chicago School of Ventriloquism," billing herself as "The World's Greatest Ventriloquist," an immodest claim made by others, as well. Her ads featured such alluring headlines as, "Study This Wonderful And Mysterious Art. Ten Lessons Will Make You A Wonder! A Welcome Guest In Any Home."

She made promises as if she were running for public office. Her "guarantees" predicted fabulous feats which, unless the circumstances were perfect, could only be achieved by the fictitious Valentine Vox. For example, "Just imagine you're a ventriloquist at a social gathering. Imagine the sensation you would cause by throwing your voice so that people would think they heard a voice under the floor, behind the piano, outside the window or in back of a door." Those effects can be done, but not many professionals are fully adept at it, so they are certainly not easy for a beginner.

"The World's Greatest Ventriloquist" did not take any chances either. If prospective students could not be induced to part with their money to "Study This Wonderful And Mysterious Art," Madame McDonald also offered such fare as: "...instructions in the banjo, piano, mandolin, voice culture, stage dancing, and the whistle." To make sure "the buck stopped with her" she covered all the bases. It is not likely that Madame McDonald helped to inspire many to take up the art, since we have not yet found any other references to her or her school.

Most ventriloquism books were written by men, such as when Grosset & Dunlap, of New York, published Bergen's *How to become a ventriloquist*, which was probably not written by him alone. But in that same year, 1938, an unknown woman, Natalie Morgan, wrote *Self-instruction in ventriloquism and dummy making* also published in New York, by Reader Mail, Inc.

While many early female practitioners, influenced by, and feeling competitive with males, modeled their acts after them, several tapped into their own talents and imaginations. They enriched the field with clever variations. Thus, imitation gave way to innovation

In the early 1940s, Asta Sven, a sexy vocal trickster, added a new dimension. She bantered with a mustachioed figure she named "Senator Birch," an outrageous lecher. However, she was not content to just sit or stand with a classic carved partner, as everyone else did. Instead, the "Senator" tossed his verbal "passes" at sexy Miss Sven, who fended off his improper propositions with good-humored banter, while they danced a tango. This would make headlines today!

In vaudeville, women were often unbilled fixtures of a male performer's ensemble, unless they had their own acts. It was standard practice for many males to hire pretty girls as assistants to bring their equipment on stage, handle props, be the subject or target of some apparently dangerous stunt, to cue applause or to merely stand by as lovely stage decorations. Their insignificant and insecure status led to the anonymous billing after the headliner's name. Thus, the all-inclusive, always current, generic listing as:

and Company

One lady who went from dancing as an "and company" to headliner was Emily Carlin, from Atlantic City. She caught the eye of voice jockey Walter Walters, a

standard vaudeville "single." It's a classic success/love story. They met, fell in love and eventually married. Walters taught Emily his art, put her into his act, and helped her become one of the top female ventriloquists. Together they became the successful team of "Walters and Walters" which, with the addition of Emily's talents and lovely presence, finally brought Walter Walters headline status.

Walter and Emily's act opened with a park scene, with Walter and a boy dummy sitting on a park bench. Emily made her entrance with a girl dummy who wore roller skates. After comic banter among the foursome, Emily and girlfriend left. This allowed Walter to apparently play a slide whistle while his wooden partner sang — all at the same time after which Emily, now dressed as a nurse, reentered the scene pushing a baby carriage with a crying infant. Nurse Emily tries to quiet the baby by giving it a bottle. After much cooing and gurgling, the baby stopped crying. It was, naturally, assumed that the baby cry was being produced by Walter. The boy dummy and the nurse now carry on a conversation.

"Where did the baby come from?"

"The stork brought him. Would you like to see the baby?"

"No, I'd like to see the stork."

The baby starts to cry again. Walter commented, "I think that baby is spoiled."

The "boy" explained, "Naw, they all smell that way."

The baby continued to cry until Nurse Emily picked up the supposed "baby," rocked it and put it back in the carriage. Leaving Walter alone with his boy dummy, Emily began to walk off stage, pushing the carriage.

As the crying baby sound followed along, the audience became aware that the baby cry had actually been done by the "other" Walters. An appreciative wave of applause would usually accompany her exit. Emily Walters was one of the few women vaudevillians of her day to earn recognition in her own right.

Walters & Priscilla

After she gave birth to a real crying baby, a son, Walter Jr., she still continued performing with her husband. Though Walter and Emily had top billing in public, their private cooing began to fade. Eventually they parted domestically and professionally. The divorce settlement was typical for that time. Emily retained custody of their son and the "crying baby" routine. Walter became, once again, a "single." He also worked with Priscilla.

Vox and Walters

After being out of work for a while, Emily sought a new partner by placing an ad in a theatrical paper. She finally joined with another associate, a French Canadian gentleman named Wilfred Moran, also a standard vaudeville "single" whom you may recall used the professional pseudonym of Valentine Vox. Emily contributed her "crying baby bit" to the new endeavor and again made her mark. As "Vox and Walters," the act

became one of the most talked about teams of vaudeville's heyday, sharing bills with such famous headliners as Cardini, Georgie Price, Cab Calloway and The Marx Brothers. When they played the Palace Theater, in New York City in 1930, they were billed as "The King and Queen of Ventriloquism."

Walter Walters Jr.

Walter Jr. continued the family tradition begun by his parents, Walter and Emily. He, too, was a master of the "crying baby" bit and played the same vaudeville circuit as his parents, with his own clean-cut, classy act.

One of the standard questions asked is, "How did you get started as a ventriloquist?" In the case of Vicki Taylor, the answer might be — You fall in love with one!

Taylor was a fan of Roy Douglas, a curious character who appeared at the prestigious New York Palace more than any other ventriloquist in history. After dating only a week, Vicki and Roy tied the knot. Vicki joined her mentor/husband in a successful double act. Working with two dummies, the pair gained fabulous national notices and began to build a successful career together.

Vicki Taylor

However, after the birth of their son, Ronnie, Vicki and Roy divorced. Vicki, attractive and personable, went on to become a skilled solo vent under her maiden name, Taylor. She presented various vocal specialties and innovations created by her ex-husband. These included Douglas' renowned "Double Voice Bit" described in Ripley's famous column, "Believe It Or Not.." Fred Ketch is another name associated with multiple, simultaneous voices.

Following the Second World War, television came into homes throughout America. One of the first personalities to receive an award for her work in this new medium was ventriloquist Shirley Dinsdale, along with her dummy, Judy Splinters, who will be given her due in the chapter...To TV.

Another girl who got her start on early TV was the charming and multifaceted Angela Martin. With her beautiful singing voice, Angela featured her partner Tiny singing with her. Angela first displayed her ability to ad-lib during an audition for the producer and the staff of *Star Time*, a talent showcase. She had neglected to secure the dummy's pants onto his body form with thumbtacks. As Tiny began to sing *"A" - You're Adorable*, the pants began to slide down. She covered the situation like a trouper by asking the chuckling group, "Why are you laughing? What does he know? He's only a dummy!"

Young Angela Martin

The fresh, but cute, little boy dummy who talks back to his partner has long been a familiar character for both male and female ventriloquists. A brash doll patronizing paying patrons with humorous insults was quite a deviation, especially when manipulated by a woman. This device of shocking people into laughing proved to be

both practical and profitable when utilized by vaudeville and nightclub specialist Kay Carole, a most creative lady.

In yet another example of focusing on our strengths, rather than our weaknesses, Carole's inability to memorize scripts was compensated for by the gift of ad-libbing. In this way, she developed her distinctive style. Tommy, a Frank Marshall masterpiece, hurled insulting comments long before the Don of disdain — Don Rickles — made it popular.

Tommy, who wore an eyepatch, used a deep masculine voice to dispense his abrasive humor, while sweet Kay, demure and feminine looked on, hardly ever saying a word. The illusion is that the doll, and not the dame, is doing the damage. It has been said that Kay's offbeat approach, in which the vent hardly ever speaks for him/herself, is reminiscent of others who perform deadpan while the dummy carries the routine, such as The Great Lester with Frank Byron Jr., and Arthur Worsley with his verbose pal Charlie Brown.

Obstreperous interrupters are easy targets for Kay's rapier wit. A boorish heckler might elicit the squelch, "Lady, you look familiar. You heckled me ten years ago. I never forget a dress." Another evening in Las Vegas, a patron who exceeded her drinking capacity wouldn't cease jabbering until Tommy told her, "Hey madam, gimme a break. I'm trying to work up here. Be quiet or I'll go where you work and turn off your red light." The laughter silenced her.

I also fondly recall a lady I had met, but had never seen perform, when she was known professionally as Maxine. Her name was Lilllian Dawes. Long retired from show business, she showed me her publicity photos taken in her youth, in the early 1900s, which depicted an exotic brunette. Unfortunately, I never obtained a copy, but I include her here for another reason. We had lost touch, but she came to my attention shortly after she passed away in a small, furnished room where she lived alone, in New York's theatrical district. Because no family members could be located to claim her effects, the Public Administrator's Office was called upon to evaluate, and dispose of, her belongings. A City Marshall checking out her room discovered a suitcase under her bed. He opened it, took a look and, horrified, ran for a phone to call his superior. He hysterically reported, "There's a dead kid under the bed..." and never returned to the scene.

Obviously he overreacted to Maxine's treasured dummy, which was probably made by John Turner around the mid 1900s. Although she no longer worked with him, her partner of long standing had that special sentimental hold on her and she kept it all those years. Since it was an object of value and couldn't be thrown away, it was taken to the department's office. An inspector there, who knew me, called. He explained the situation and pleaded, "Will ya please come down and take that damn dummy away?"

More than happy to oblige, I rescued Maxine's orphan. In the case was a very tall black bag that fit over the figure, as a blindfold — but it had two big peep holes cut out of one side, so while I never saw her perform, I assume she did some

mindreading spoof with her partner. I never found anything with his name on it, but he now *has* the appreciative home she would have wanted for him.

Kay Carole, Doris Faye and others have proven time and again that although theatrically defined as "novelty acts," vocal illusionists are first and foremost versatile comedians. Even though they may work with their childhood pals, they can easily delight adults as well as amuse children.

Unfortunately, all of us have been pigeonholed into one small slot, by that symbiotic, "natural enemy" of entertainers - the theatrical booking agent. Though sometimes characterized as a necessary evil, the agent has been defined as, "One who hates a performer for collecting ninety percent of his salary."

It is believed that, long ago, one of these employment scouts limited our job range by establishing the false notion that, "Ventriloquists are strictly for kids."

Why that happened is not clear. Perhaps it started with the award-winning Shirley Dinsdale and her successful children's show. It could possibly come from the fact that many children take up the art casually, as a hobby, or keep their childhood pals as mementos. It could simply be that puppets have been associated with child's play. Whatever the origin, this stigma has been hard to erase in spite of the fact that such stars as Shari Lewis, Vicki Taylor, Edgar Bergen, Jimmy Nelson and others less well known have enraptured adults in a variety of clubs, cruises and organizations.

Doris Faye, a sexy, shapely redhead, was one performer who had her fill of the misconception. Faye "paid her dues" in countless engagements in a wide variety of cafes, using the name "Princess Ticklefeather" working with her dummies dressed as Indians. She appeared on the highly acclaimed children's show "Wonderama," and as Bozo the Clown's sidekick on WPIX in New York. These programs were financially beneficial. Unfortunately, when she decided to return to nightclubs, she woke up to a nightmare of the typecasting trap. Tired of beating her pretty head against the limited imaginations of agents, she set out to prove that she had mastered an art form which could surely beguile people of all ages.

During a trip to Las Vegas, Doris Faye sat in the lounge of the Stardust Hotel, discussing various booking problems with a theatrical agent. This was in the late 1950s when stage nudity was in vogue. As they watched the topless revue, the agent pointed to the bare-breasted dancers and suggestively inquired, "Can you top that?"

"Top it? I can make mine talk!"

The agent laughed and told her, "Well, if you can, I can get you all the work you can handle."

That conversation started Faye thinking. If nudity was what they wanted, nudity was what she would give them — but on her own terms. She started to create an act designed to satirize the nudity trend. Her imaginative sense of humor inspired her to devise a playful, original, seductive, sexy approach, to the ancient art that had to be seen to be believed. She took the word "Ventriloquism" literally. Derived from the mistaken belief that the disembodied voice emanated from the abdomen, and originally meant "belly talk," Doris Faye not only made her belly talk, but other

exciting areas as well. With crafty costuming and mechanical devices, she evolved a delicious illusion of nudity. Calling her presentation "The Torso Floor Show" and billing herself as "The Talking Torso," she produced a genuinely animated anatomy lesson. She divided her body into individual sections, each of which had its own personality. These characters even had names. There was the saucy, titillating, "Talking Top," her flirtatious "Talking Naval" and her raucous "Living End." Since they all talked and sang, the comedic combination made Doris Faye a true busy-body.

There is an old show business theory that is beginning to fade. It was believed that to *be* funny, a woman must *look* funny. Laugh-makers who definitely contradict this narrow minded view are the gorgeous contestants who use this clever craft as their talent entry in beauty pageants. Physical beauty and intelligence alone obviously do not a beauty queen make. Some sort of competence must be demonstrated for the judges. As a result we have all been exposed to contestants who sing, dance, play instruments, perform magic, do acrobatics, and other offbeat talents. Add to those, "perform ventriloquism." At one time a comedy routine by a comely woman with a wooden pal was considered a rarity, but today, the field of ventriloquism has been glamorized by a bevy of beautiful sisters of the art.

One woman who crosses the path of both beauty pageants and Gospel ventriloquism is vivacious Vonda Kay Van Dyke. She started as a professional ventriloquist and then entered the contest. After winning as "Miss Arizona," she became the first professional ventriloquist to be crowned "Miss America." After her year's reign as the beauty queen, she relinquished both her crown, and her promising nightclub career as well, to apply her talent to the Gospel field. She began promoting the message of the Bible using the very art it had banned centuries before.

Attractive Sandy Rings, "Miss Kansas" of 1971 and winner of the talent competition in the 1972 "Miss America" pageant, later turned pro. Using her "Rollo the Rabbit" figure, she became spokesperson for Astroworld amusement park in Houston, Texas.

Sandy Rings

Marie Mclaughlin, a former "Miss Pennsylvania," and a finalist in the 1976 "Miss America" event, also turned professional and became a phenomenal success as a sales rep for a candy company. With "Timothy," she enthralls the throngs at promotions, industrial and fashion shows, dinners and conventions. Her sales record attests to a highly profitable fact: A pretty girl can be provocative and attention getting, but a pretty girl with a funny dummy is irresistible. In 1998, she and Timothy opened a restaurant called "Timothy's" in Trenton, New Jersey, which is, in their own words, "The first restaurant owned by a real dummy." It is a mini-museum, where Timothy oversees the operation from a corner of the bar, and the walls are lined with photos of ventriloquists, whose dummies are sure to ask for **their** own restaurant too.

Paige Phillips, "Miss Alabama" of 1980, won her first runner-up status in Atlantic City using her dummy in her bid for the "Miss America" crown. Doris Faye had also been a runner-up as "Miss New York."

The Sept 17, 1984 issue of *People Weekly* ran an article on young Corliss Collins. The freckle-faced Oklahoma City twelve-year-old learned the craft from her brother, Bryson, who was in the Marines. “I used to play with his dolls,” says Collins, who’s been performing professionally since she was six and a half. “He gave it up when he started dating. But my mom still got requests for him to perform, and she would tell them, ‘My daughter’s a ventriloquist too.’”. She appeared in an episode of CBS’ Dallas without her wooden co-worker, “I don’t want to do this all my life. I want to be a professional actress when I grow up.”

There have been others who wished to be professional actresses, as well. The artist seen on the left appeared on English stages around 1913. As in the picture, the audience saw a glamorous woman with a lovely hairdo, in a gorgeous gown. “Thora” has a sweet soprano voice which is in complete contrast with the growling “Popeye” quality of her bellhop character. They entertain superbly and “Thora” switched voices convincingly. At the end of the performance, the woman ventriloquist pulled off her wig to reveal herself as none other than a bald headed man! Hugh “Thora” Thorn seems to have been the first actor/ventriloquist to pull off this clever switch. It is only logical that, in a chapter about women in the art, we include the ersatz as well as the genuine, because deception, illusion, and misdirection are all components of fine ventriloquism.

Thora

A later pseudo-femme vent is Bobby(ie) Kimber, well known in Britain. “Mr. Bobby” worked in conventional male garb at the start of his career. He became “Miss Bobbie,” purely by accident. Kimber was appearing in a low budget, all male revue. As in times past, all the female roles were portrayed by men. Kimber, the youngest member of the cast was informed that, since his legs and figure showed best in skirts, he would have to play the ingenue.

For each show he would dress as a woman and then he would change his outfit for his vent act. One evening the usual routine was altered and he had no time to change his costume. Still dressed in drag he went on with his dummy. This was so successful, he realized he had a winning, winsome combination, and another “mister sister vent” joined the ranks. *The Grapevine News* of April, 1942, p. 2-3, had this little comment, which sums it up quite well. (Emphasis original, some minor typos corrected, after all, it was typed directly on a mimeo stencil)

> A London member wrote me some time ago and asked me if I had seen HER. He remarked upon the excellence of the act and that SHE had a charming personality, that HER technique was faultless and that SHE WAS THE HIT OF THE BILL. I am afraid that this London member, in common with thousands of other people, has been completely TAKEN IN with the lovely "LADY" that no doubt he would have liked to have TAKEN OUT. The "LADY" is NOT A LADY (Sorry Bobbie.. that doesn't sound right) I mean the "LADY" IS a lady, but only on the Stage, she's NO LADY off the Stage. (Gosh! that's WORSE) What I really mean, well, to put it bluntly, is a member of the MALE SEX, but the superb make-up, the tout ensemble, is a real masterpiece and must be seen to be appreciated. The act is difficult to describe, but briefly SHE, that is HE, works with two "Figures" (One large, one small) with modern style dialogue and introduces some very clever imitations (Barking Dogs, Popeye, etc) via the large "Figure". Also introduced into HER, I mean HIS act is the TALKING HAND.. a very HAND-y and so-FIST-icated item that always gets her, HIM, a big HAND. The night I saw her.. HIM, she..HE was in grand form and her, HIS big "Figure", not Bobbie Kimber;s figure, the "Figure" she, HE uses was in excellent shape, and I figure it.. OH! FIGURE IT OUT FOR YOURSELF and go and see her, HIM IT.. for yourself. He will be pleased to see you...or will SHE?

Probably the most elaborate switch with it's own twist, was the presentation entitled "Lucky Nutty Jones." It began with a three minute silent film in which, "Lucky Nutty Jones," a lecherous old man, escapes from a nagging wife to do a little joy riding with a blonde. The plot evolved into a wild car chase which ended in a crash. The film faded and the movie screen rose revealing a full-stage, "live" view of Jones, the "hero" of the film. He is lying helpless in a hospital bed, while being cared for by a pretty, redheaded nurse named "Lydia Dreams." This became a twenty-three minute sketch of frolicsome flirtation between the nurse and the injured Jones.

The lecher's jealous wife now enters the scene and announces that Nutty Jones is **her** Mr. Jones. The nurse counters that he is actually **her** "Mr. Jones" and, to prove it, removes the old man's head!

Everyone was shocked., gasps were heard, followed by murmurs. Then the dumbfounded crowd broke out in hearty hand clapping as they realized the seemingly lifelike "Nutty Jones" was actually a ventriloquial figure. They had been taken in by a truly brilliant deceiver. By the time things settled down, the redheaded nurse approached the footlights carrying the decapitated head which told her, "Nursie, things are not all they seem to be in the world today."

The nurse, replied, "You're right, Mr. Jones, they're not."

At that instant, off came the lady's red wig, causing an even greater gasp from

the bewildered observers. Pretty nurse “Lydia Dreams” was actually a man!

Lucky Nutty Jones was an English-style vent figure, which did not have the slot or sliding jaw, as described in “The Birth of the Dummy.” Only the lips moved and there were no telltale gaps, so, from even a short distance, the head looked quite realistic. Lydia Dreams was the nom-de-ventriloquy of Walter Lambert, an English thespian genius of many talents. He was not only a master vent, but also a makeup artist, skilled mechanic, dress maker, set designer and a brilliant character actor. He even played “Lucky Nutty Jones” in the film. It was said the only things he didn’t do for his shows were sell and collect the tickets, but he did fill, and fool, the house.

Vaudeville had several famous female illusionists, also called impersonators or imps for short. Some two person acts looked like man and woman acts but one was an imp. When Milton Berle moved from vaudeville to television, he brought his old vaudeville gags along and dressed in dresses. Lambert’s act was most unusual because he was also a ventriloquist. Switch acts, as they were called, were extremely popular and well paid. There were even women who portrayed young men, which was not as spectacular, though it allowed the women to bare their legs and arms, causing a stir in that era. Males playing females in the theater is actually an old custom, dating back to when women were not permitted to perform on the stage. Today, women of most western cultures have many options open to them, both inside the theater and outside. Among the major players are Michelle La Fong, who has a snappy act with which she tours top clubs. Another excellent performer is Judy Buch, who utilizes her ventriloquism in corporate presentations and schools. Nowadays women have choices: do a completely clean act, or have the dummy say the risquè lines — playing both sides of the fence. One of the most outrageous entertainers is the talented, disarming, Terri Rogers. Born in Suffolk, England, Terri’s interests as a teenager included baton twirling and art. Those interests later included magic, though the focus has been inventing new miracles, and writing books for fellow performers, rather than exhibiting them professionally. Along the way, talented Terri caught “vent fever” and has never regretted it, and neither have we.

Terri and Mr “Shorty” Harris

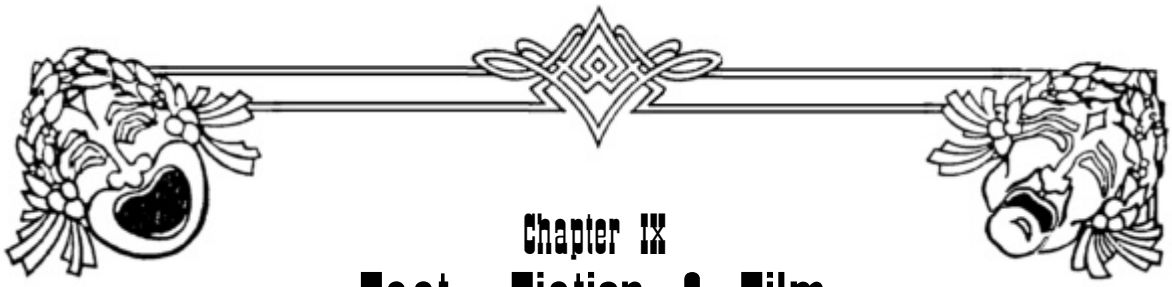
As England’s premier performer, Terri has starred in countless television shows both at home and abroad. Entertaining on cruise ships and in smart, international supper clubs requires a clean, family-oriented repertoire with which Terri excels. For example, Shorty challenges Terri to a “Peter Piper” tongue twister contest. It’s a close call, with Shorty slightly ahead. However it does soon become quite apparent that Terri is certainly gifted with uncanny “lip control.”

Appearing throughout England and the continent, and on television here as well, Terri dresses in a sophisticated style and has a stately demeanor which fit into high society festivities of the most regal variety. Yet, Terri is also a perennial favorite with male-only groups. Curiously enough, the basic material is the same for both — "pure as the driven snow!" How is that possible? At bachelor parties and certain affairs specific words, attitude and inflection change the direction. Terri makes a rather sedate entrance, with Shorty standing by, opening with a genteel, "Good evening, all. It is a distinct pleasure being here with such a cultured group of refined gentlemen." "*Oops. Wrong act!*," the audience thinks. A rude member will inevitably call out something like, "Hey, bring on the broads. Where are the girls?" This is just like volunteering to be run over as Shorty retorts with rapier wit. If the occasion demands, the master might use ribald heckles and jolting, yet jocular rejoinders, which is what this particular crowd actually expected all along. The clean material is interspersed, but during any rowdy exchange, Terri remains aloof, seeming to disapprove, even though everyone is raucously laughing at the rambunctious Shorty. With such characterization and contrast, it is easy to accept Shorty as the source of it all, which results in Terri Rogers receiving the respect afforded royalty holding an audience, while the laughing audience is holding their sides.

So, a tip of the hat to our pioneer sister ventriloquists of the past, as well as to our contemporaries following in that great tradition. They add their own twists and bring our ancient art up to modern standards. Among them are Terri Rogers, Shari Lewis, Carla Rhodes, Judy Buch, Lynn Trefzger, Michele LaFong, Alicia Dacoba, Quinn Horn; the stars of today and, of course, tomorrow.

From the Witch of Endor to "Miss America," the female ventriloquist has made her presence known, with wider variations, fewer limitations, and clever imitations. Both women and "women" have featured the witch, the "hex," the "switch" and sex; the bawdy, the gaudy, the tawdry, and even the divine.

Yet, have you wondered why we hardly see any of them today? While acts in those days, as today, were of variable quality and appeal, they attracted different people for personal reasons. Like comedy today, which has many different performers with different styles, most ventriloquists were enjoyed by so many people for so long that one can only wonder — in a world of nostalgia that looks back fondly at the "good old days," that even revived some old *Ed Sullivan Show* segments, why is it that most of us have never heard of, or seen, almost any of these wonderful acts in some kind of re-run? Why is it we only seem to see the weird ventriloquist or maniacal dummy movies? Lucky "Nutty" Jones summed it up best when he said. "Nursie, things are not all they seem to be in the world today." And when the nurse, replied, "You're right, Mr. Jones, they're not." there was the unspoken question in the collective mind of the audience: "What is fact, what is fiction?



Chapter IX

Fact, Fiction & Film

The Golden Age had put both male and female ventriloquist acts in a good light; the spotlight. The previous two chapters offered a sampling of the wondrous variety of original, witty routines, both wholesome and titillating, which captivated nightclub audiences and theatergoers. Though that spotlight has come and gone, today many people still think of them as pleasant, even clever entertainment. Yet, in the back of one's mind — the shadows of thought — an odd, uncomfortable sense of foreboding may be felt. At times one might also tend to believe ventriloquists are: 'eccentric,' 'weird,' 'strange,' 'eerie,' or even the extreme 'schizoid,' and 'homicidal maniac' from the way they or their inanimate partners are sometimes portrayed in the media. How did the idea of depraved ventriloquists and demonic dummies get into the act? What is fact? What is fiction?

So many factors were involved, it would be almost impossible to determine exact cause and effect, so only the highlights will be mentioned, but the trend is clear. Ventriloquism's sordid roots were, of course, partly responsible. The "Facts" were hard to come by, the "Fiction" was divided between the 'witches,' the con artists, the comical and the deranged. Regardless of the exact cause, film brought all those factors together in such an unparalleled way that vaudeville and all its participants would be profoundly affected.

From its beginning there was the basic duality of good and bad inherent in the origins of, and attitudes toward, ventriloquism. While all those bright spotlights were illuminating ventriloquists out front, what vague concepts lurked in the dark shadows behind? But it was more than just the shadows behind which were the problem. It was something that was placed between the spotlights and the performers — a distorted, illusory imitation concocted and projected by others which obscured the reality of ventriloquists. It was the fantasy of "Film," which shared ventriloquism's aspects of art, science, hoax, illusion, and theater — fact and fiction — plus a few remarkable ingredients.

Today, with computer-generated special effects that can make movie stars interact with themselves, or even dead movie stars, nightmarish aliens, nonexistent monsters, and long extinct dinosaurs come alive, it is hard to visualize film's humble beginnings, or how these could have any effect on the art of ventriloquism. There is, however, a very close relationship.

In the old days, the early "moving pictures" simply depicted a slice of life in action on film. They amazed those first viewers with simple activities of daily life in motion such as people walking down the street, traffic moving along and other basic happenings. Later, the medium was employed to transport information around the world. For example, actual events were reported in newsreels which were eagerly anticipated. It was believed by many audiences of the era that film recorded a silent reality; that is, it accurately preserved whatever was put in front of the camera. That accuracy has since been challenged by experts, but at the time it was accepted. Soon, live acts were captured on film, with that same sense of accuracy. When stories were told and sets were built many films still depicted familiar things and themes, which further maintained their, perhaps undeserved, reputation for trustworthiness.

In short order, there were early fantasy films. More like broad comedy, they came on the scene because of those who appreciated and exploited the unique properties of film — the motion picture pioneers whose concept of illusion was dear to their hearts. These were stage magicians who had projected the still images of the glass magic lantern slides, including rudimentary animation and exotic imagery, to great advantage in their big shows. Clouds of billowing smoke served as a screen to capture the light of projected and reflected images — smoke and mirrors! Such light and image shows dated back to early Chinese civilization. Starting in France with magician Georges Méliès, they applied their talents and expertise to devise magical effects on film by originating methods which are still used today. They created ghosts, expanding heads of real people, flights to the moon, and instant vanishes and appearances. Many of these same magicians actually featured a short film, with the "magic" of what was appropriately known as "trick photography," — a term which lasted many years but has given way to the more commonly used "special effects" — as a highlight of their full evening extravaganzas. As **the** masters of illusion, they could not imagine that they were really putting themselves out of the magic show business. The invention would soon turn on its master — and later, ventriloquists and all of vaudeville.

For a while, films and vaudeville even teamed up; theaters offered feature films, shorts (films generally under ten minutes) and live acts for the price of admission. In fact, Lydia Dreams successfully incorporated a short film right into a most unusual live ventriloquial act called *Lucky Nutty Jones*. This marvelously clever sketch was described in the previous chapter. Toward the end of his career, The Great Lester was asked to perform a shorter version of his act, live, so that the reels could be changed between movies, but it did not work out for him.

Nevertheless, there were basic differences between vaudeville and film, which soon became obvious. On the one hand, vaudeville featured real live performers who exhibited various legitimate skills and were true to their art, although there were harmless spoof performers too. On the other hand, a movie producer could get almost any actor to play almost any role and do almost anything, while making it seem believable. That was the actor's art. That also heralded the beginning of the end of

vaudeville. Eventually non-magicians in particular and non-performers in general realized that you could do more on a screen than a real magician, or any live act, could do on a stage. Early cinematographers did record some actual vaudeville acts on film. A live act can appear on only one stage at a time, while the same act on film could be shown all across the land at the same time. These live acts were soon completely replaced by their moving images. The public went for the enhanced image at a reduced price, rather than the genuine, and within a short time many full evening magic spectacles, and almost all vaudeville performances, were replaced by movie shows. For this reason, Houdini, the legendary escape artist tried the medium of film. He did his escapes legitimately, without trick photography, but the results were not as good as he had hoped, since the audience thought that there was camera trickery anyway. As the medium of film developed, the harmless light comedy of live stage vaudeville — ventriloquists and magicians — disappeared with barely a trace. However, movies would be seen by, and influence, more people, in more places, for many more years, than any vaudeville act ever did or could. Unfortunately, this included the negative stereotypes. The genie had been let loose and could never be put back in the bottle.

That ventriloquists are considered “mad” is not a modern invention on the part of writers. On the dark side, the concept of mental illness being associated with so-called witches, and ventriloquism being exposed as merely “sneaky speaking,” had been divulged by Reginald Scot’s book in the 1500s. Reports of minor scams perpetrated with ventriloquism were described in Chappelle’s book, in 1772. One tale about a malevolent ventriloquist dates back to America in 1776, when Charles Brockton Brown wrote *Wieland*. It is considered to be the first American novel by a professional writer. It was originally a “feuilleton,” which is a novel published in installments, in a serial form, a more common method back then. At the time, it was “must” reading, and is still studied in literature classes, though today it sounds stilted. The plot revolves around a person who creates havoc and ruins lives by “throwing his voice” and having people “overhear” others “say” things they would not ordinarily. It was successful and was followed by *Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist* which was published in *The Literary Magazine, & American Register*, 1st Edition. Published serially from 1803-1805, by John Conrad and Co., Philadelphia. Biloquist, or speaking in two places, an unusual, but logical, word rarely seen in literature and no longer in use today.

As we progress through the early 1800s the lighter side of the art is featured by John Rannie and later Richard Potter who used ventriloquism simply as a form of entertainment for Americans so that they might “sweep away dull care.” [See “Roots...”] Potter did once claim to even a score using a ventriloquial prank, when he was snubbed at an inn. In 1840 *Valentine Vox* was published in England. The character of the same name, who has his own chapter in this book, was basically a harmless prankster ventriloquist, but the author played fast and loose with the art. On a darker note, in 1843, Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote;

> And then, as the bystanders afterwards affirmed, a hissing sound was heard, apparently in Roderick Elliston's breast. It was said, too, that an answering hiss came from the vitals of the shipmaster, as if a snake were actually lurking there, and had been aroused by the call of its brother-reptile. If there were in fact any such sound, it might have been caused by a **malicious exercise of ventriloquism**, on the part of Roderick.[35] [Emphasis added]

In 1881, when Tony Pastor was helping ventriloquism take center stage, and Thomas Edison was developing the celluloid industry, ventriloquists never dreamed that film would tarnish their Golden Age or their reputations.

As ventriloquism and its stars were rising, Robert Louis Stevenson published *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, in 1886. This frightening story took the duality of the human mind to its extreme, with its portrayal of a split personality, at this time only a concept in a book, and not simultaneously. But it subtly set the stage for the "vengeful ventriloquist."

By no means complimentary, Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, (1844-1900) the famous German philosopher, wrote in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, (1883-1892):

> At the most, I regard thee as the ventriloquist of the earth: and ever, when I have heard subversive and spouting devils speak, I have found them like thee: embittered, mendacious, and shallow. Ye understand how to roar and obscure with ashes! Ye are the best braggarts, and have sufficiently learned the art of making dregs boil. [There also appears to be a connection to magic, as well.]

Of course, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, there were Englishmen who appeared here and abroad portraying female ventriloquists, around 1910/1913. Hugh Thorn, Bobby Kimber and Walter Lambert had acts which were quite unusual, but it was all in good clean fun. They are worthy of mention again here because the idea will pop up in film, around ten or so years later, but without the good clean fun.

How then, might a harmless stage illusion become the model for the *loss of identity*, or mental illness? Since all entertainment is illusion, upon entering the theater the audience has agreed to suspend disbelief. In ventriloquism the goal is to help them believe by creating the illusion that the dummy is really alive. If the ventriloquist didn't, the audience wouldn't enjoy the act, critics would pan it, and the performer would be considered a poor entertainer. The key, then, is how it looks to an audience. It looks "real" because successful ventriloquists practice these "backstage secrets."

Briefly, the ventriloquist usually creates one or more characters that have contrasting, and exaggerated, personality traits. With each one, the voice contrast may be of a higher or lower pitch than the performer's own natural voice. The pace of speech may be faster or slower. In addition there may be an accent. The body

language of the dummy conveys feelings. The movements of its head, mouth, and eyes must be smooth and convincing. The ventriloquist/actor must act and react as if it all were real, to make it seem real to the audience. No wooden performance here.

For example, even though Bergen was not technically proficient in lip control, his characterization and animation of quick-witted Charlie made everyone believe he was real. In contrast to Charlie, Mortimer was slow witted. Many ventriloquists worked with their inanimate partners as a comedy team. The vent was the "straight man" who set up a joke or an opinion which would be countered by the punch line, apparently from the mouth, and supposedly from the mind, of the dummy. Monsieur Brunard appeared to be a wise, urbane Frenchman, his partner, Joe Flip, an urban wise guy. Thus, when a show is over, the audience, taken in by the illusion, often does not want to see the 'little guy' stuffed into a suitcase, although some ventriloquists do just that, and often get laughs, especially from adult audiences, who see it differently than children do.

Some nightclub entertainers prefer to have the dummies appear to step over the bounds, while being chided by the ventriloquist for their "inappropriate" language. The act is based more on ribaldry than ribbing. This is especially common in the "rubber chicken" roast circuit. The rubber chicken refers to the overcooked food at these dinners, and the "roast" is form of comedy commendation.

The style that has the most impact for this chapter is in direct contrast to Bergen's banter. In this case, other eminent vaudeville performers remained almost completely silent, while their dummy did what was essentially a monologue. During their partner's patter, the nearly silent ventriloquist merely responded with a carefully planned word or two. America's Great Lester and England's Arthur Worsley were noted for this method. While staying in the background, they built up to the climax. After skillfully rehearsing and performing their act time after time, the dummy seemed to come alive with a will of its own. To some that may have made it appear to be inhabited by an evil spirit, or as just a vehicle to have the "quiet" or "reserved" ventriloquist's own hidden personality come "unmasked," as it were — thus they might have felt they were seeing the real Hyde hidden in Jekyll.

No matter how thoroughly the audience wants to believe it, the ventriloquial "split personality" is nothing more than a clever, carefully planned and well rehearsed illusion, of one or more separate entities. It is acting more than one role nearly simultaneously which is what helps to make it enjoyable to the audience and truly believable. The question is, do they ever believe the dummy is real? Yes and no. Yes, to the extent that any actor or actress, who plays a part, does better when they get 'into' the part. No, when they are not performing, although, even then, they often try to maintain the illusion.

One thing is for sure, the skill of the ventriloquist and the believability of the dummy are fodder for the fertile imaginations and writings of authors, playwrights, and reporters. While some writers blaze new trails, most keep in touch with the pulse of the public, so that there is a market for their output to provide their income. It is

therefore equally important not to overlook the obvious — novelists, story and film writers and producers would logically pattern their wares on successful acts and ideas and give them a new look. Today we call them spinoffs or rubberstamp shows. During the Golden Age of Vaudeville, ventriloquists were featured headliners, whose names were up in lights. Bergen and The Great Lester were familiar names. They and others who were equally good were prominent in entertainment, appearing across the country and in England, and receiving good salaries and numerous write-ups in the press — which was also the goal of those who write and produce. Naturally, they would incorporate something familiar and entertaining in their works — they would include ventriloquists.

The audiences were so familiar with vocal illusionists that they could easily read the words or watch the silent screen and "hear" in their minds, the sound illusions portrayed. If the reader or observer were not familiar with it or able to imagine it, the story would be meaningless.

So, here are the ingredients list and a recipe for a mad-ventriloquist myth: Take one strange, but popular art, sprinkle in a checkered past, mix in some creative, talented, convincing, and dedicated ventriloquists, set aside while waiting for them to rise to the top, sift their acts for the best ideas, whip up the enthusiasm of equally creative and talented fiction writers with no allegiance to the art of ventriloquism, add a twist of plots, stir the imagination of the public, **blend everything together without the ventriloquist**, and voila! You have an — engastro-myth!

Therefore, it is no surprise that a talented French reporter/writer published a novel in France, in 1910, that was to take the world by storm. It featured an elusive, maniacal madman who could throw his voice all over the place. It was called... well, you might know it, but we'll save that for just a bit.

One of the biggest changes from light to dark, from comedy to tragedy, though barely perceptible at the time, happened a year later, in 1911, when audiences saw the first motion picture that we know of to use a ventriloquist theme. *The Ventriloquist's Trunk* was a short, one reel, slapstick comedy from Vitagraph Pictures. However, it was more than just the very first film we know of to feature the uncanny vocal/auditory illusion we call ventriloquism. It was silent!

It begs the question, "Was the producer being true to that art?" No, the art didn't count. In silent films the visual was all that mattered. Ventriloquists with witty routines and superior ventriloquial skills need not apply. That specialist could be, and was, replaced by an actor. Through vaudeville's phenomenal success, everyone knew exactly what a ventriloquist was. The image was provided by the movie, the sound was provided by the memory and imagination of the viewer.[The reverse will be the basis of radio.]

The Ventriloquist's Trunk, a slapdash affair with plausible and implausible plot elements, had a modified "behind the scenes" theme. Here is the description, sometimes politically incorrect, which was published in the trade paper, "Moving Picture World"[36] [Explanatory notes and comments added]

The Ventriloquist's Trunk
Vitagraph Pictures 12/13/1911.

> Eligible men are scarce at summer hotels. At the beginning of our story there is one male Mr. Bunny. But he is not enough to withstand the siege of old maids and other specimens of femininity.
>
> The arrival of Professor Dinkenspiel, a ventriloquist, causes considerable commotion and a great deal of curiosity. Miss Flora, a spinster, loses no time in trying to make a conquest of his heart causing Bunny's jealousy. The Professor is shown to his room where he unpacks his trunk and places his ventriloquial puppets about the room. He begins to rehearse the performance which he intends to give that evening. Miss Flora sees him through the ground glass of his room door, conversing with one of the puppets, which she thinks is a human being like herself. [Perhaps an unpaid guest?] She immediately arouses the proprietor and the guests [Why?] who try to break into the Professor's room but do not succeed until he has dropped his trunk out of the window [Again, why?] onto the head of the suspicious constable [policeman] waiting below. Taking advantage of the constable's plight he loads the trunk into a peddler's wagon and drives off at breakneck speed. When they discover that he has flown all hands start in pursuit of the fast disappearing wagon from which fall articles of merchandise. The trunk cannot withstand the jolts and bumps and it goes the way of the other contents of the wagon. Professor Dinkenspiel is captured by the constable who insists upon him opening the trunk in the presence of the pursuers. The Professor does so and brings forth the puppets who have been the innocent cause of all the trouble. Miss Flora falls into Bunny's arms and the Professor embraces the puppet which bears a striking resemblance to Miss Flora.

At this time in early film many lead characters often used their own names. In this case, Mr. Bunny is John Bunny, Miss Flora is Flora Finch, performers from vaudeville who became headliners of the Vitagraph studio, where they made many films together. Mr. Bunny, a heavyset fellow, had a career which only ran five years, but he made more than one hundred and sixty film shorts before he died in 1915.

The name Dinkenspiel is an interesting construction which is not flattering to a ventriloquist. "Dinky" is an informal word meaning, "of small size or consequence; insignificant, or of poor quality; shabby." "Spiel" is a colloquial or conversational term for, "a lengthy, usually extravagant speech or argument intended to persuade," and comes from the German or Yiddish. So the name Dinkenspiel is an ersatz German-sounding contradiction in terms which roughly means something like "insignificant shabby long extravagant speech to persuade," thus, "a waste of time." Perhaps this name would be more suited to an election campaign or a candidate; "The

candidate tried to get votes with a dinkenspiel." "Candidate Dinkenspiel talked about an hour, and nothing else."

Much the same way that the name of the lead character served as an opportunity for semantic antics, the film was merely an excuse for some frantic antics as well. At this time, the so-called "ventriloquist" (it was an actor and he was silent) was just rehearsing, and not presumed to be crazy, but it was a significant turning point — ventriloquists were no longer in control of their image. It is no surprise that the industry term used is "captured on film." Now, remember, there were cod performers who spoofed acts of all kinds, including ventriloquists, but film was a new medium that reached far larger audiences, and as we shall see, far longer too.

As for the plot idea, it is perfectly reasonable for people to hear ventriloquists having conversations with their partners whether they are aware that someone is listening or not. All performers, no matter what their specialty, must limber up, run through their lines, or moves, and rehearse part or all of the act before a show. Ventriloquists not only do that, they may ad-lib just for the heck of it, in case of hecklers, or as they develop new material. They make sure their figures are in working order. When singers vocalize, everyone says, "Listen to them rehearse." When ventriloquists run through their act, the effect is weird as the doll answers in its tiny, odd voice, which may cause people to whisper, "Listen, he/she is talking to it as though it were real!"

Of course! This isn't mime. The ventriloquist is actually acting, speaking, moving and even breathing for two, or more. You bet it takes rehearsals to make it look real. That movie was based on fact, but exaggerated it. As they talked, the "ventriloquist" and particularly his dummies were simply used as the logical *model* for a humorous case of ***mistaken*** *identity*. Anecdotes in other chapters show that this is quite possible.

However, the ventriloquist will also be used as the logical *model* for a ***change*** *of identity*, and finally in the horror stories, to depict the ***loss*** *of identity*, as the loosely linked "chain of events" will seem to lock in the "Mad Ventriloquist Myth."

Back to that novel mentioned earlier. It was a hit, so in 1911, Gaston Leroux's novel, which had been published in France, the year before, was translated and published in English, in both British and American editions. It was about strange happenings in the large, foreboding and eerie Paris Opera House. You may have heard about it. The story was called *The Phantom of the Opera*. Here is a segment which is not too well known, but has a direct bearing on the art. The scene is deep in the multilevel maze-like bowls of the opera house: [**emphasis added**, from the French, 1911 translation by Alexander Teixeiros de Mattos, warning - very graphic]

> ...My dear little Christine!...Are you listening to me?...Tell me you love me!... No, you don't love me...but no matter, you will!...Once, you could not look at my mask because you knew what was behind....And now you don't mind looking at it and you forget what

is behind!...One can get used to everything...if one wishes....Plenty of young people who did not care for each other before marriage have adored each other since! Oh, I don't know what I am talking about! But you would have lots of fun with me. For instance, I am the greatest **ventriloquist** that ever lived, I am the first **ventriloquist** inthe world!...You're laughing.... Perhaps you don't believe me? Listen.'

The wretch, who really was the first **ventriloquist** in the world, was only trying to divert the child's attention from the torture-chamber; but it was a stupid scheme, for Christine thought of nothing but us! She repeatedly besought him, in the gentlest tones which she could assume:

'Put out the light in the little window!...Erik, do put out the light in the little window!'

For she saw that this light, which appeared so suddenly and of which the monster had spoken in so threatening a voice, must mean something terrible. One thing must have pacified her for a moment; and that was seeing the two of us, behind the wall, in the midst of that resplendent light, alive and well. But she would certainly have felt much easier if the light had been put out.

Meantime, the other had already begun to play the **ventriloquist**. He said:

'Here, I raise my mask a little....Oh, only a little!... You see my lips, such lips as I have? They're not moving!...My mouth is closed — such mouth as I have — and yet you hear my voice....Where will you have it? In your left ear? In your right ear? In the table? In those little ebony boxes on the mantelpiece?... Listen, dear, it's in the little box on the right of the mantelpiece: what does it say? 'Shall I turn the scorpion?'...And now, crack! What does it say in the little box on the left? 'Shall I turn the grasshopper?'...And now, crack! Here it is in the little leather bag....What does it say? 'I am the little bag of life and death!'...And now, crack! It is in Carlotta's throat, in Carlotta's golden throat, in Carlotta's crystal throat, as I live! What does it say? It says, 'It's I, Mr. Toad, it's I singing! I feel without alarm — co-ack — with its melody enwind me — co-ack!'... And now, crack! It is on a chair in the ghost's box and it says, 'Madame Carlotta is singing to-night to bring the chandelier down!' ...And now, crack! Aha! Where is Erik's voice now? Listen, Christine, darling! Listen! It is behind the door of the torture-chamber! Listen! It's myself in the torture-chamber! And what do I say? I say, 'Woe to them that have a nose, a

real nose, and come to look round the torture-chamber! Aha, aha, aha!"

Oh, the **ventriloquist's terrible voice**! It was everywhere, everywhere. It passed through the little invisible window, through the walls. It ran around us, between us. Erik was there, speaking to us! We made a movement as though to fling ourselves upon him. But, already, swifter, more fleeting than the voice of the echo, Erik's voice had leaped back!

Soon we heard nothing more at all, for this is what happened:

'Erik! Erik!' said Christine's voice. 'You tire me with your voice. Don't go on, Erik! Isn't it very hot here?'

Ah, just the thing ventriloquists needed. "The first ventriloquist in the world," is likely a mistranslation of premier which means "first in status or importance" and "first to occur." Notice the voice being thrown about like bubbles of sound bursting everywhere.. Here is a vicious, vindictive version of Valentine Vox. The ventriloquist as a madman requires no imagination, it is there in its stark, dark depiction.

The Ventriloquist's Trunk and *The Phantom of the Opera* one a silent movie, the other a silent novel, would not appear to have much in common other than a ventriloquist, but they were far closer than they seem.

Shortly after they appeared, there was also much activity and controversy on the psychological front. Sigmund Freud, and several collaborators, showed a skeptical world that we *all* have subconscious thoughts; a second or hidden "shadow" personality, lurking just under our thin layer of awareness, but which has great influence upon our thinking, our actions, our lives. By the way, what were dreams all about? Robert Louis Stevenson had actually dreamed his tale, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. It did not mean that he was mad, but what a strange dream.

At the time Freud's ideas were radical and though they were later accepted, more recently many of his ideas have returned to the arena of controversy. When Freud presented his premise, it was considered heresy, in a replay similar to that experienced by Scot. [See "World's Oldest Con Game") The 'Establishment' did not support the concept that an unconscious mind could be invisibly influencing us. What about choice, or responsibility? Throughout the controversy, the public became aware of the possibility of one's "other self," which had already been frighteningly portrayed in print by *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. No longer was that just a story — according to Freud, it could now be reality.

While movies were still silent in 1916, Carl G. Jung was not. A collaborator of Freud, he remained outspoken in spite of the controversy and published *The Psychology of the Unconscious*. In 1924, Freud's papers were made available in English, and many novels, with psychoanalysis in their theme, appeared in print,

including the widely acclaimed, *The Magic Mountain*, by Thomas Mann. Also at this time there was a famous stage and silent movie actor named Lon Chaney, a master makeup artist known as "The Man of a Thousand Faces," who even wrote an article on theatrical makeup for *The Encyclopedia Britannica*. In 1925 he made two sinister silent films. One was none other than *The Phantom of The Opera*, in which he starred in the title role. It was his most memorable and famous one. Though silent, the movie remained a classic. There were many other movie versions and several stage productions that came and went, until 1985, when the Andrew Lloyd Webber musical took the world by storm, and along the way, the ventriloquist concept from the novel was all but forgotten. Perhaps that is quite fortunate.

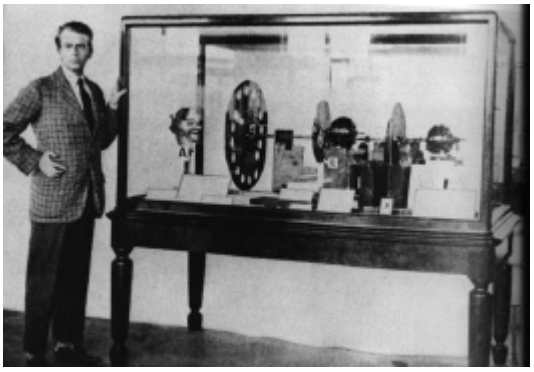
Chaney as the Prof.

The second sinister movie Chaney made in 1925 was titled *The Unholy Three*. The story involved Chaney as 'Professor Echo.' Notice that the name refers to a sound effect, as well as one of the erroneous, and popular, theories of ventriloquism. The "Professor" was a carnival ventriloquist and consummate con man. When a larcenous midget named Tweedledee (Harry Earles) causes a free-for-all fight, the carnival comes to an abrupt end. Professor Echo (Chaney) joins forces with Tweedledee and another carnival performer, a dull-witted strongman named Hercules (played by the well known character actor Victor McLaughlin).

The craft of ventriloquism was taken in a crafty direction when this unholy trio creates a twofold scam. Using a pet shop as a 'front,' the "Professor" disguises himself as the elderly woman owner. Remember when such switching of identities was successfully presented by actual ventriloquists in vaudeville, it was an uncommonly commendable and entertaining theatrical subterfuge, rather than a despicable deception. [See "Women and Ventriloquism."] Supposedly "she" sells "talking" parrots. The first scam is that the ventriloquist actually supplies the voices for the birds! *Caveat Emptor*. The bilked buyer, unaware of the trick, is thrilled with her purchase. Of course, when she gets the parrot home, it doesn't utter a word. Quite a scheme, but there's more.

A complaint to the 'nice little old lady' in the pet shop elicits a house-call to examine the bogus bird. Chaney, still in drag, naturally, shows up as the elderly lady. However, the midget is in a baby carriage, disguised as a small child. A Trojan horse. "She" explains that she had no place to leave her darling little "grandchild." While the nice "little old lady" visits with her victim to examine the passive parrot, the malicious midget robs the house, conveniently hiding the loot in the carriage and giving new meaning to the term "baby booty."

Though not a psychological horror movie, it portrayed a "ventriloquist" in a negative way, as a cunning con artist. Again, the ventriloquist was replaced by an actor. Once again it was silent Thus, in a way, he portrayed two dark ventriloquists in silent films. However, the movie served as a vehicle for Chaney's formidable skills as a great make-up artist, and the ventriloquist, à la Walter Lambert, et al, served as a logical *model* for a case of "*change of identity*." Chaney was another link in the chain.



John Logie Baird, an eccentric television pioneer who lived in England, stands next to a display case with his mechanical Nipkow disk television apparatus. On the left is his favorite model, "Stooky Bill," who patiently posed for experiments in 1925 - 1926.
In October, 1925, Baird wrote, "the dummy's head formed itself on the screen with what appeared to me almost unbelievable clarity. I had got it!" (Malcolm Baird)

While vaudeville and variety were declining and film was becoming king of the media, something else was going on in England and America, though not many people noticed or even cared. John Logie Baird, a bright, imaginative, clever, young, and idiosyncratic British inventor who held a persistent vision of television, was demonstrating his clever but crude mechanical television apparatus during 1925-1928. He was the first to transmit images, in 1925, and the first image to be so transmitted, and honored, was his patient and untiring model, a ventriloquist's dummy! He surely used ventriloquist dummy heads as stand-ins for his experiments because they would never tire of endless posing, but especially because of the extreme heat generated by the lights needed for those insensitive early cameras, which was far too hot for a human to tolerate. They served until the goal was achieved, and the moving jaw showed up on the screen, in motion, just like the faces of people he would one day transmit. Thus the first television picture ever transmitted was "Stooky Bill." How did Stooky Bill get his name? His son, Professor Malcolm Baird says, "The word 'stooky' is an old Scottish pejorative meaning (approximately) 'stupid.' The reason for 'Bill' is unknown." [See also "...To TV"] The old Phonovision images of Stooky Bill, recorded on wax disks by Baird over seventy years ago, have recently been retrieved by Don Mclean, using lasers and computers. Though they do not show exactly what the original images looked like, they do show an image of the first ventriloquist figure ever to be transmitted and later, recorded. They were grainy, like looking at yourself in a fogged mirror in the bathroom. But this was still thirty years before video recording became commercially practical. Both Baird and Mclean merit credit for their achievements.

In 1927, Philo Taylor Farnsworth, (1906-1971) an American electrical engineer demonstrated a working television system, here. Working, perhaps, but very fuzzy and distorted. Few people outside of the field took notice, so he has not received the credit due him. At the time, it was not as big news as the new talking movies that were making history. Meanwhile amidst all the media attention surrounding the successful performers, and the controversy about psychoanalysis, Freud died; but he

left his “stamp of approval” on the wide open hidden field of the unconscious, and its conflicts. Freud’s revelations provided new fuel for many writers. They would be busy incorporating his ideas into their way of looking at, and writing about, their characters. In 1927 Gaston Leroux died, but his Phantom lived on, though the ventriloquist character would fade away. Yet there were still ways to turn the clever comedy contrast and proficient acting skills of the performers against them.

To an observant writer, the veteran ventriloquist/dummy team could serve as *the perfect*, ‘textbook’ model to “demon”-strate’ Freud’s mental duality — the ‘other’ or ‘shadow’ personality lurking in the dark, behind the out-front image in the spotlight. Since each of the many ventriloquists had an original style of presentation, vaudeville was a veritable smorgasbord of ideas to put down (an ironic phrase) on paper or “capture on film.” The more skillful they were and the more believable their characters, the more they helped to reinforce the myth. The more unusual they were, the more plot options they offered.

In that same year author Ben Hecht wrote a story entitled “The Rival Dummy,” which appeared in *Liberty Magazine*. What it took liberty with was the image of the ventriloquist. It was probably the first with a psychoanalytic motif using a ventriloquist to show subconscious conflict right out in the open, arguing with “himself!” The myth of the madman ventriloquist which had been born earlier, would now gain prominence. As a short story it appears to have had little impact on the public. It might not have ever had any major effect on performing ventriloquists had it not been noticed by a film producer who saw profit potential. When he bought the rights, it became open-season on ventriloquists. Note the story’s generic title too.

Entertainment usually tampers, in some way, with reality. A book or story leaves things up to your *own* imagination, with some variations for each individual, while film provides a ‘standard’ image which creates a more uniform and accepted model. There would be repercussions when *The Rival Dummy* would be used as the basis of a film and the title would be changed. Film transformed a writer’s ideas into a special illusory reality. Today, we have multimedia, with many sounds and images combined, and interactive methods of getting involved in some way. Then we have virtual reality, where simulators add additional sensory input and feedback, with movement we can feel. With the advent of film, the imagination of writers could be projected onto the screen and vividly into the minds of the viewer. In addition, and unfortunately, audiences still felt that “seeing is believing,” reinforced by the viewing of those newsreels, which were still in vogue, of which Movietone and Pathè were two big names. Even today, though we know it is only make-believe, while watching a thriller we feel the tension build. To those early viewers it was even more powerful. The sights on a screen, reinforced by the communal experience of being seen in the same way by their friends and neighbors, gave fantasy images a ring of (undeserved) truth. Of course, that same idea is still used, or rather exploited to this day, since it is well known that advertisers pay to have their products, whether cars, cereal, drinks, clothes or candy, (and, formerly cigarettes) appear in films. They also enthusiastically

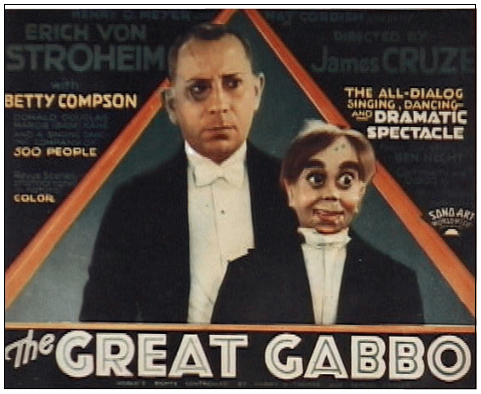
tout their wares, “As Seen On TV,” as if that purchased exposure somehow makes their product better, which surely it must in the minds of the public, or it would not pay to keep doing it. Fred Allen’s comment is on target: “Advertising is 85% confusion and 15% commission.”

That ventriloquists would be used to portray mankind’s frailty was probably destined to happen, sooner or later. One old technique called “prosopopea” refers to an absent or imaginary character that is represented as speaking. Then there is another that predates Shakespeare, who is probably the first to come to mind when the old theatrical technique called soliloquy is mentioned. In the most famous example, he has his character, Hamlet, thinking through his problem. Hamlet speaks his thoughts out loud as words we can hear.

Through the technique of soliloquy, the audience can experience his internal conflict. He is not actually considered to be “talking to himself.” Soliloquy has the same root as both colloquy and ventriloquy. Colloquy (com = together + loquy= to speak, thus speak or talk together) is an older term, now less commonly used, for “conversation.”

Therefore, it would not be a big leap to see that by simply masquerading the old stage technique called soliloquy with the clever subterfuge of ventriloquy you get a one-person colloquy — which is what ventriloquists have when they speak “with” their partners, or unseen cast members and by logical analysis — themselves. While there is nothing irrational about soliloquy as a technique, the ventriloquist talking to a dummy with a contrary, or contrasting, personality serves as a model for internal conflict externalized.

Thus, the ventriloquist with a sinister alter-ego would be firmly established in film when, in 1929, the year of the stock market crash and the onset of the Depression, the movie made from *The Rival Dummy* premiered with its title changed to *The Great Gabbo*. It contained many parallel elements to the top ventriloquist of the day and that is covered in “The Golden Age.”



The masterful Eric Von Stroheim, who was cast in the title role, played an arrogant, egomaniacal performer. He abuses his devoted female assistant who takes care of his dummy and other props. His anger arises from perceiving the dummy as a rival for her attention.

Unable to tolerate his mistreatment any longer, she leaves him and later on marries. Meanwhile, Gabbo rises from being a small-time performer, in the Patterson, New Jersey area, to the ranks of stardom. Eventually he and his former assistant meet up when they appear in a revue, where Gabbo is headlining as the star attraction. When he learns she is married, he goes berserk and storms on stage brandishing a sword, ruining the finale of the show. He is forcibly taken away and, as the film ends,

an electrician is seen removing the fallen star's name from the marquee as the no-longer-great Gabbo despondently walks down the dark street, dragging his dummy, Otto, behind him. This is FICTION!

FACT: The vanguard of vaudeville ventriloquists, Lester among them, were true to *their* art, skillfully and cleverly creating acts with partners that had believable, usually contrasting personalities, which seemed truly separate (schizophrenic) in identity. The FACT is, they did it so well that they served as the writers', film makers' and actors' models, for whatever stories they could imagine and bring to the screen. The only fact of this film is that Von Stroheim "performed" (he was an actor, not a ventriloquist, and he did not even supply the voice of the dummy, which was provided by George Grandee, without credit) as a ventriloquist in the style of The Great Lester. The main difference was Gabbo's having a female assistant for the plot to work, since Lester was a solo act. Von Stroheim, true to *his* art, brilliantly and chillingly created the character he was cast for: a schizophrenic ventriloquist. So much for the changing view of ventriloquism as a purely comedic art form.

Thus *The Great Gabbo*, with its seeming "ring of truth," had a rather unfortunate 'sequel.' The Great Lester, who was the best-known ventriloquist at the time, sued the producers, Vitaphone Pictures, (literally: "Life Sound Pictures" in Latin vita = life and phone = sound) for a not "true-to-life" invasion of privacy, claiming the film was an infringement of his life and work. Though angry, Lester had never gone 'mad,' and to his satisfaction, won the suit. However, there is yet another "sequel" to this story, which takes place about eight years later. The illusion of the moving image is persistent in more ways than one.

With this movie, the ventriloquist was used as the logical *model* for a case of *loss of identity*. From now on, using the ventriloquist as a model, film would appear to drag out into the 'open,' and throw onto the big screen, the most fantastic, fictionalized convoluted conflicts ever imagined, between the conscious and subconscious; the "dual personality duel." And later, it gets worse!

While Chaney had made many silent movies, he refused to do any "talkies" which were just coming on the scene. As late as 1929 he claimed to have many faces but just one voice. However, a year after the success of the Great Gabbo in 1930, Chaney was finally persuaded by the studio to do an exact remake of *The Unholy Three*, but this time in sound, which now displayed his vocal versatility as well. Ivan Linow replaced Victor McLaughlin as the strongman. Unfortunately, this was both Chaney's first talkie and his final film, for during its production he was dying of bronchial cancer. When it was released, to great acclaim, he was asked to portray Dracula in a movie, but he died two months later, in August of 1930.

This was a classic tribute to larceny, both silent and then sound. Following on the heels of *The Great Gabbo*, it, unfortunately, helped to further establish the unsavory reputation of ventriloquists.

Just as movies work on the phenomenon of persistence of vision to blend the series of 'still' pictures into the illusion of smooth movement, they also gave people

illusory graphic images of ventriloquists which persisted in their minds, often for years. Skillful acting made the mad ventriloquist myth seem reasonable. Though it may be hard to believe that vivid visual images, with no basis in reality, could be remembered as real, it is a FACT: Thus, in 1937, Ed Sullivan, a young columnist for The New York *Daily News* wrote that The Great Lester destroyed his dummy and was committed in an insane asylum. Pure FICTION. *The Great Gabbo* had come back, once more, to haunt Lester.

What made the separation of Fact from Fiction more difficult was the way they were sometimes blended together. Keeping one's name in the public eye was very important. Therefore, performers looked to press agents to create wild stunts. But that is all they were — a fictitious creation for the sake of publicity. One well-known Broadway flack was quite frank about the process. His business cards read, "Dick Falk, Liar for Hire." The object is to have one's client appear in print, regardless of the circumstance. The technique of exaggeration for publicity-seeking often crossed the line between reality and fantasy. As long as someone is in the public eye, regardless of the reason, they are considered a hot property, because they are made into public figures by the media. It has escalated to such a degree that today even infamous murderers, drug lords, and other assorted criminals or people who have gained notoriety are given lucrative book, TV and movie deals and interviews.The reader is sure to recall them from sports, entertainment, government, scandals and other areas. Who said that crime doesn't pay?

So, the fact that The Great Lester, on occasion, was known to berate his dummy, blaming him for a bad performance, and being upbraided in turn by the dummy, can be seen as just maintaining the illusion and giving people something to talk about. While contributing to the myth of the erratic ventriloquist, it all comes under the umbrella of showmanship. The Great Lester was such an incorrigible practical joker, he went so far as to have contracts drawn up which called for two dressing rooms, one for himself and one for Frank Byron, Jr. Since Lester was usually listed on programs alone, it might not have occurred to some rare individual who may not have been familiar with the pair, that Frank Byron, Jr. was actually Lester's dummy. Everyone else understood it was just part of the act.

Edgar Bergen treated Charlie McCarthy as though he were a real individual without losing contact with reality. For example, in 1937 the papers reported Edgar Bergen had bequeathed a fund of $10,000 to make certain that, "...Charlie McCarthy will live forever after his present partner is dead and gone." What was that all about?

BERGEN'S WILL (Excerpt)

"I, Edgar John Bergen, give and bequeath to the Actor's Fund of America, the sum of ten thousand dollars, ($10,000.00) to be held as a separate fund, to be known as the "Charlie McCarthy Fund." It is my sincerest wish, and I request that said fund be managed, invested and re-invested, and the entire income be used... to give gratuitous performances of ventriloquism... at orphanages, welfare homes, and other such similar institutions for destitute, unfortunate and handicapped children."

"...It is my request and earnest desire that the Actor's Fund of America, shall forever care for and keep "Charlie McCarthy" in good and serviceable condition and repair... and that the ventriloquist so selected to give such gratuitous performances shall always use 'Charlie McCarthy' when giving such gratuitous performances."

When Bergen was a young performer looking to promote himself professionally, his manager, Jack Mandel, hired press agent David Green, who was considered a genius in his field. While looking around for public relations "angles," Green read in Robert Ripley's "Believe It Or Not" newspaper feature, about someone who had left a fortune to a beloved cat. "Hmm.. How about to a dummy?" he reasoned. He had lawyers check out the legality of such a bizarre bequest. While this might have been contrived by a publicity agent, it did sound like a sincere bequest established to protect a 'loved' one that Bergen had spent more time talking 'to' than any friend, relative, or business associate, certainly at that time of his life. Since Bergen was not married at the time, "The Will" was actually written so that he could, shall we say, "keep Charlie alive in the hearts and minds of the public, even when he, Bergen, was no longer around."

The Will was then published in the New York *Law Journal*. Lawyers were invited to suggest ways in which it might be strengthened to prevent the dummy heir from being disinherited, at a later time, by disgruntled relatives desiring to break the Will. It was then picked up by all the papers, and proved to be a great publicity success, as was young Bergen.

Also in 1937, in a Sunday supplement, I read an account of a Chinese ventriloquist named Ching Ling Foo who supposedly lost his mind when a competitor "murdered" Ching's beloved dummy, Ling Ting Pu. According to the story, Ching Ling Foo adored his little partner, a funny looking figure, and lavished affection on it to the point of obsession. With it he achieved the status of a superstar.

One performer who, according to the story, resented Ching's success, was not satisfied with injuring Ching in a fight. He wanted to put him out of business. The result was sheer devastation. The rival walked into Ching's dressing room between shows and hacked and smashed little 'Ling Ting Pu' to pieces, leaving nothing more than splinters and rags.

When Ching returned and saw the destruction, he became hysterical. He was sent to an asylum for the insane. There he was uncontrollable until the remains of his beloved Ling were placed in a cell with him. This helped to quiet him, but he never regained his sanity and died, supposedly of a broken heart, some months later. He was buried with his inanimate friend.

Quite a story. *This* could be headline material. The trouble with it is, in all my research, this newspaper account in the Sunday Supplement of The New York *American*, was the only report I've ever found. That was the year that ventriloquism, and stories pertaining to the art, were so very common, thanks to the popularity of Bergen. At the time, it would have caused much excitement in the world of vaudeville, and the trade papers would have given it prominent space, especially if Ching were really a superstar. He wasn't. Back then there were a dozen newspapers published in New York City, but not one of the others mentioned it.

I could only turn up one obscure reference to this so-called 'star.' Back in 1915, there was an advertisement for ventriloquist dummies in a monthly trade magazine

for magicians, *The Sphinx*. The carver who placed the ad listed several clients whom, he claims, bought his figures. Ching Ling Foo was one name on the list, but I have found no proof that it referred to the same person.

VENTRILOQUISTS
ATTENTION
I HAVE NOW ON HAND A FULL LINE OF VENTRILOQUIAL FIGURES FROM $10.00 UP. I AM SUPPLYING
Ed. F. Reynard ..... Ching Ling Foo
Edith Montrose ..... De Voe and Dix
Al Baker ..... Maxine
Gertrude Barnes ..... Christine
Guy Jarrett ..... Carter De Haven
AND MANY OTHERS WITH VENTRILOQUIAL AND ANIMAL FIGURES. WRITE TO ME FOR PRICES. ALSO SEND TEN CENTS FOR DR LAND'S CARD CATALOGUE AND ONE CARD TRICK FREE.
Clyde W. Powers
1440 Broadway
New York, N. Y.
An advertisement in the magic magazine *Sphinx*, February 1914.

Additionally, neither I, nor any other professionals in the business, nor our agents, had ever heard of this 'star' Ching Ling Foo, except for the ad. Nor have we heard of a dummy, Ling Ting Pu, or for that matter, knew of, had ever heard of, or even read of, any ventriloquist anywhere, who had ever gone crazy, or any such incident, contrary to all the macabre films and bizarre tales. This story, like so many others appears to have been merely a writer's fabrication based on some actual names floating around. However, because of the strangeness of this particular yarn, and perhaps based on this one article, I have heard something like it mentioned on occasion, as a weird show business legend, much like other persistent urban myths, such as alligators living in New York City sewers.

That same edition carried the story of an Australian ventriloquist, Herbert Dexter, who worked his way to America, where his dummy "helped" to break up his marriage. Dexter had built his own partner, named "Charlie," a life-size walking figure, with an arm that saluted! He and "Charlie" performed on the nightclub circuit, where Dexter met a pretty, blond singer. In true storybook fashion, they soon fell in love, married and honeymooned. His new wife was amused when he brought Charlie along but took it in stride, assuming it to be her husband's security blanket. She surely reasoned that immediately following the honeymoon, they would be performing as a trio and would need to rehearse. However, she would later regret the situation. The new act, much to her chagrin, gave the dummy all the laughs by making mean, insulting remarks at her expense. Audiences thought it was very funny. It seemed to them that the little guy, and not her husband, did the insulting. She felt she was treated as though she were dumber than the dummy. However, it gets worse.

There was a point in the act where she stood to one side as the dummy saluted. Once, the dummy saluted on cue, but, instead of standing to one side, she was standing slightly in front of "Charlie,"... and the little hand got her in the derriere. She was startled, and embarrassed, but the audience howled. Dexter saw a 'good thing' and kept it in the act for the big laugh. She became even more jealous of her husband's affection for his little friend, who sat on his lap more than she did, and ever more resentful at being the butt of the jokes. She gave Dexter an ultimatum; make a choice; her or the dummy. Dexter was in a bind. He had always made his living with the dummy. After all, he seems to have reasoned, you can always replace a wife, but a good dummy you can be comfortable with, and a smash act, is hard to come by. As far as he was concerned, there was no contest. Dexter let her go.

While it appears to have gone too far, something must have been really wrong, because they might have considered changing the act, or the wife might have been less sensitive and joined in the laughter — all the way to the bank. She filed for divorce, claiming alienation of affection and naming Charlie, the dummy, as 'co-respondent'. She told the story to the judge, explaining that on stage, she felt less important than a prop, and he granted her request. There was probably more to it than this, but we may never know, yet this sounds really outlandish too. However you may be surprised to hear that it is not made up.

Dexter and Friends

Herbert Dexter was real, and I knew him as a talented performer with a strange sense of humor. For fourteen years he hosted his own television show, *Berti The Bunyip*, for children, on station WPTZ, in Philadelphia. Although I know he was a masterful mechanic in the ventriloquial field, it seems he was a bust at home, and the story is true. So, here we have the same supplement, two stories, one strange fiction, the other strange fact! That combination is what makes the bogus stories so convincing.

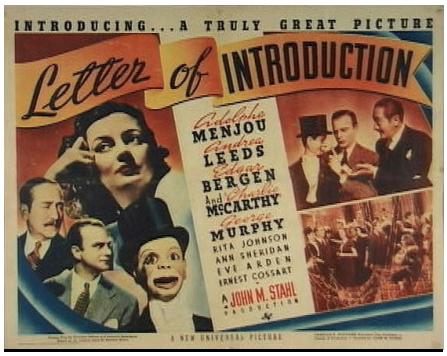
What is a Bunyip? While unfamiliar to most Americans, it is quite familiar to Australians. Briefly, a Bunyip is a mythical creature of the Aborigines and is usually noisy and fierce. Whether or not Dexter based his choice of character on the tales of the Bunyip, there is a Bunyip River, a Bunyip State Park, south-east of Melbourne and the charming country town of Bunyip in the vicinity too.

This tragicomedy is not unique to the field. Anyone with an obsession is a victim of it. This includes pet owners who neglect their family for their pet, workaholics who give up their loved ones for their jobs or careers, golfers who "putt" their families into jeopardy and car or boat enthusiasts who spend all their spare time working on their equipment. Because ventriloquists have a propensity to quip, and they are equipped with a dummy which may be named in the suit, domestic problems, though certainly not peculiar to ventriloquists, definitely do appear peculiar, and therefore make the papers, in contrast to other stories which the papers make.

Just as performers want publicity, so do producers. They want their films noticed because the more they fill the house, the more they fill their purse. Negative news, and negative films get more publicity. But not all movie moguls went that route.

Fortunately there were fun films that helped reaffirm ventriloquists as the amusing entertainers they have come to be. These movies focused on the flip-side; wholesome family oriented fare. They showed actual sidesplitting comedy, rather than fictional split personality tragedy, but not for long. The 1932 British move, *Don't Be a Dummy*, by Director Frank Richardson, was a silly farce where star William Austin plays a nobleman who has lost his fortune at the gaming tables and takes up a career as a cod ventriloquist, using a jockey as his dummy. It's a charmless, harmless movie.

Nineteen hundred and thirty-seven was a big year for the art. Frank Morgan, who is probably best remembered for his role as the befuddled wizard in *The Wizard of Oz*, played a kindly king whose hobby was ventriloquism, in M.G.M.'s *Rosalie*.



A year later, in the English movie, *St. Martin's Lane*, with Vivien Leigh and Rex Harrison, the great Charles Laughton did a bit with a dummy. He was a busker, a street performer who is paid by passing the hat.

The enormously popular Edgar Bergen and company enlivened many films, in 1938, sometimes as the stars. Bergen was quite a gentle and sympathetic man who changed the format of the ventriloquist, and removed the "psycho" image from the art, when he contributed his brilliance to *The Goldwyn Follies*. In *Letter of Introduction*, with Adolph Menjou, Ann Sheridan and George Murphy, Bergen did his "Society Party" routine, with Charlie and Mortimer. This particular skit was performed at Noel Coward's party, which helped launch Bergen's career. He also did a clever 'Talking Horse Bit' that frightens a drunk into sobriety. By the way, in October 1938 the Federal Minimum Wage Law went into effect. The minimum wage was twenty-five cents an hour!

Not to be outdone, Bergen's pal played himself in *Charlie McCarthy, Detective* in 1939, with Robert Cummings. In this busy year, Bergen found time to make *You Can't Cheat An Honest Man*. His friend and co-star was W. C. Fields, who wrote the film, using the name Charles Bogle. Names were a particular hobby with Fields. (See box)

> Fields was an irascible man of many talents, and names. He liked to play with sounds, and words. For example he was also known, at times, as Mahatma Kane Jeeves. Jeeves was the butler of Bertie Wooster in the popular P.G. Wodhouse novels of the era and his name soon became synonymous with "Butler." It was a play on Mahatma which meant leader. He used it to create the name which really meant "My hat, my cane, Jeeves."

The movie industry was slowly growing as vaudeville declined. A wider audience got a chance to see Bergen and McCarthy in films, shorts and later features, none of which were considered great films, even though they were great fun. These included *Two Boobs In A Balloon, Double Talk,* and *Feudin' and Fussin.*' In *Nut Guilty*, Bergen appears as a judge in a courtroom scene and in *Free And Easy*, Edgar and Charlie play two tramps. The 1941 film *Look Who's Laughing* starred Lucille Ball, Fibber Mc Gee and Molly, who even promoted it on their radio show, with Charlie and Edgar, November 11. Then it was one or two pictures a year for the next three years including, *Here We Go Again*, for 1942, *Stage Door Canteen* (a "support the war effort" promotion with Harpo Marx, Ray Bolger, Helen Hayes, Katharine Hepburn, George Jessel, Peggy Lee and scores more!) brightened 1943 and *Song Of The Open Road*, in which Charlie had his own little Charlie, in 1944. For a chronology of all of his films see note.[37]

Times were changing. There would still be comedies, but there would now be a darker side. The shadows were slowly taking center stage. It began in 1944, during the second World War.

That's when a Spanish movie from Mexico, *El As Negro* (The Black Ace), appeared. It was a spy film with the star and author, magician David Bamberg, as Fu Manchu, a magician/detective, along with two others. Fu Manchu uncovers a plot wherein a ventriloquist uses his figure to send messages to a secret agent in the audience. Not quite the evil guy we will see later, but certainly not a hero.

The era was a study in contrasts. On the one hand, live performances were still considered to be worthwhile entertainment. For example, Cy Leonard is a dedicated ventriloquist whose illustrious career spans more than five decades, so you know he has been around the block a few times. In fact he has nearly been around the world a few times! The Canadian government selected him as a member of a show to be sent to entertain U.N. and NATO troops in Europe, Egypt, Israel, Cyprus and at an army base just a bit south of the North Pole. After that, it was a piece of cake to be working a few cruise ships for a number of years. He is still an active ventriloquist providing excellent entertainment value, as are others, or they would not be re-booked. Though they may have a director or manager and writers who take charge of the details behind the scenes, out on the stage, Cy, and other ventriloquists like him, are the stars in charge of their acts. And now Cy has also diversified into working as an extra in films. That is the point, films are a different medium and they are out of the control of the ventriloquist. Also, while live entertainment still held audiences, the need to be different drove the producers to enhance the acts and the movies. Audiences demanded more too. Today, movies are often merely vehicles for showing off special effects. The latest round of special effects wars includes *Star Wars* and was epitomized by *Wag the Dog*, which implied that you did not need a war, just the look of a war — special effects.

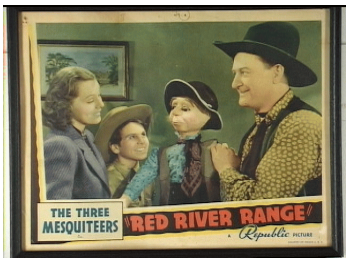
As early film makers realized they needed to impress audiences more and more, it became clear that newsreels and reality would simply not be enough. Mere exaggeration would not fill the bill. Freud had opened the psychological floodgates of the mind while vulnerable ventriloquists stood obliviously downstream. The most grotesque and turbulent nightmares were yet to fill the screen, outdoing the goriest Greek Tragedies. Facts were left in the dust, as writers, forever feeding the fantasy of 'Film,' maligned ventriloquists who would soon be sucked into a maelstrom of morbid and malevolent movies, getting hit from both sides of the Atlantic.

In 1943 there is a strange movie showing intriguing variety acts on the British stage. In *The Dummy Talks* with Jack Warner and, Claude Hulbert, a nasty, blackmailing ventriloquist is murdered. The police disguise a 'midget' as his dummy to scare the truth out of the murderer. Poor plot and lots of red herrings here.

Another, more sinister English movie was produced before the war but not released until 1945, because of the ban imposed on horror films during the war. Thus, the pendulum swings all the way from the merry ventriloquist, past the mean

ventriloquist to the macabre “vent-thriller-quest” in the classic English chiller and cult favorite, *Dead Of Night*. In the fifth and last segment of this anthology, Sir Michael Redgrave stars as schizophrenic London nightclub performer, Maxwell Frere, who is intimidated by his dummy, Hugo. He fears that Hugo will desert him to team up with another ventriloquist, whom he imagines is his rival. (*Gabbo* had a rival dummy, this has a rival ventriloquist) To prevent that, Frere (Redgrave) fires a shot which wounds his “rival” ventriloquist. Frere ends up in an institution for the criminally insane, able to speak only in the voice of the dummy.

When these films appear, there is a noticeable attitude shift in the public mind, as many of my colleagues have noticed over the years. While they may admire your skill, and enjoy your act, there is an undercurrent that shows through as something like, “Well, you seem okay, but.... “ or they ask, “Did you see that film. What do you think? as if they had just seen a newscast about a ventriloquist who ran amuck. Fortunately this attitude fades a little... until the next one. That is why it is a double pleasure to see ventriloquists portrayed more realistically, as the harmless comedy acts they are. For example, it was back to comedy, in 1947, when Twentieth Century Fox released *Mother Wore Tights*, with Betty Grable and Dan Dailey. It featured Señor Wences performing his highly acclaimed routine at a Christmas party. Once again Bergen shines in *Fun and Fancy Free*, though not as well known as his others, it was his only film for 1947. *I Remember Mama* was a special venture for him, described in “Charlie Awards.” *Captain China*, in 1949, was his last film for a while. He would return to lighten up the shadows cast by macabre films.



During the 1950s cowboy/Western themes were extremely popular in movies and on television. In the *Range Busters* series, [a name which sounds similar to the then popular radio show Gangbusters] cowboy ventriloquist Max Terhune did ventriloquism on horseback. He worked with his longtime dummy from vaudeville days, Skully Nell, who now became Elmer Sneezwood and dressed as a cowpoke, a fun son of a gun. As a member of the similarly plotted series *Three Mesquiteers* with Crash Corrigan and Dusty King, Terhune and Elmer broke up the straight plot, as well as the audience. Even the legendary film star John Wayne got into this act.

Max Terhune and Elmer

Many ventriloquists with a fanciful sense of humor and a highly-developed theatrical flair know that the public enjoys drama and so they play up to it. In that light, was the following a desperate act or a publicity stunt? You decide.

In the 1950s I knew an oddball New York ventriloquist and figure maker, Roy Douglas, who did some weird things. There

John Wayne
in movies with
Max Terhune as
Lullaby or Alibi

1938
Pals of the Saddle
Overland Stage Riders
Santa Fe Stampede
Red River Range
1939
Three Texas Steers

was one time, however, when he decided to end it all and called to tell his agent, Ken Grayson. The worried agent notified the police who rushed to the apartment where Douglas lived. Unable to get in through the door, an officer climbed the fire escape and looked through the window only to see "bodies," (which were really his dummies) slumped over the table with Douglas in their midst. They entered and found the gas jets on. Douglas was revived, which fortunately averted a "tragedy"(?)

One movie was undoubtedly inspired by McCarthyism — both the, "Are you now, or have you ever been, a member of the communist party," Senator Joe McCarthy, and his namesake, "I'll mow ya down!" Scene-stealer Charlie McCarthy. The year was 1954 and ABC Television was bringing the senate's subversive hearings right into our homes. They would later be acknowledged as a blot on America's history. However, they were based on the differences between Russia's communism and America's democracy, which, at that time, had a "Mexican Standoff." Known then as "The Cold War" between the super powers, it provided a premise which was combined with the appeal of ventriloquism. So, that same year, two look-alike dummies, Clarence and Terrence, played a key role in the plot of the comedy spy film, *Knock On Wood*. The basis of the story is that enemy agents need to evade the authorities and in desperation hide secret plans inside the head of one of the dummies, while they are in the shop for minor repairs. When the spies try to get them back, the hapless ventriloquist, played by multi-talented Danny Kaye, is part of the hilarious confusion, in a role at which he's so adept.

In 1960, Columbia Pictures made *Stop, Look and Laugh*. It didn't have a plot, but was a compilation of zany sequences of The Three Stooges, blended into a feature-length film. The clips of slapstick's acclaimed trio, Moe, Larry and Curly, were linked with introductions provided by ventriloquism's famed trio of Paul Winchell, Jerry Mahoney and Knucklehead Smiff. While Winchell's lovable partners would hardly be the model for evil-doing, David Strassman conjectures that his partner, Chuck Wood, a remote controlled figure with an attitude, was the inspiration for the murderous movie character Chucky. On the other hand, in 1963, Charles Beaumont wrote the episode "Living Doll" for the *Twilight Zone* TV series. (This and other episodes will be found in "...To TV") This particular doll says things like "Momma," "Papa" and "I'm going to kill you!" And it means it! Whatever the origin, ventriloquism and its components seem to have had obvious appeal to the fertile imaginations of all manner of writers. With a history that dates back even before the Bible, ventriloquism possesses every ingredient for good fiction: comedy, interesting characters, a touch of the "supernatural" and versatility. With a little effort the basic comedic conflict can be embellished with romance, intrigue, and even tragedy. Therefore, the dummy is also a target. Because its on stage image is that of a naughty precocious little kid, perhaps jealous of his partner's role and position, writers can exaggerate it into a devilish dwarf, a maliciously motivated miniature menace.

That an inanimate dummy or puppet can come alive is not a new idea, either. The Greek's story of Pygmalion tells of a man who loved a statue so much that it actually came to life. *Tales of a Puppet* was one of the early and popular "puppet comes alive" stories written by an Italian. Carlos Collodi was the pen name of Carlos Lorenzini, who wrote these happy adventures, featuring Pinnochio, in 1881, about the time film was invented. The stories were later re-titled, *Pinnochio*, to reflect the popularity of the puppet who turned into a boy. The tale would later be made into animated and live action films, but not yet. Film would become a great medium to breathe life into anything — epics, fables or myths, such as those of a humorless homunculus. — a "being" but not a human being. Therefore, through the years, even when things were looking good for ventriloquism, the duality of the ventriloquist's act continues to pop up, changed from the light Vaudeville on stages to the dark and shadowy Vau-Devil on screens.

The English do it again, with none other than *Devil Doll*, in 1964.[38] (Remember, it would get worse.) In this slow, somber, dark film, The Great Vorelli, a mad ventriloquist/hypnotist, attempts to transfer a human soul into his wooden dummy.

Fortunately, Bergen once again appeared in a film in 1965, *One-Way Wahine*, and then in 1967 in *Don't Make Waves*. He made cameo appearances in *Phynx* (1970) and *Won Ton, The Dog That Saved Hollywood* (1976), where he played an uncharacteristically mean animal trainer.

Magic, directed by Richard Attenborough, was a 1978 "vent-thriller-quest" update of the "ventriloquist manipulated by evil dummy" psychodrama theme. Sir Anthony Hopkins stars as the deranged ventriloquist/magician and Ann Margaret is his love interest. Based on the book of the same name by William Goldman, this variation opens with the star tossing his voice into various places in the audience to heckle himself, along the lines of Cockton's *Valentine Vox*, a sure sign of having no basis in reality. The path to depravity is paved by "Fats" who is a vicious foulmouthed dummy spewing language unusable in the past. Hopkins dubbed in the voice of "Fats" who needles the ventriloquist into killing his agent and his ex-lover's husband. Wow. We surely needed this film.

The evil/mad ventriloquist is not restricted to books or the movies made from them. There is a character in the comic *Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight* in which there is a ventriloquist, named as a typical Batman villain. He is called "The Ventriloquist." Not your ordinary ventriloquist, but a nutsy, nasty villain, whose "real" name is Arnold Weskar. He travels with his partner, a wooden dummy named "Scarface." Weskar is mentally unstable and projects his violent tendencies onto his dummy, which does the killing. In the storyline the ventriloquist escaped from his communal home in Arkham Asylum. While he searched for Scarface, he placed a sock on his hand, and named it, appropriately, "Socko."

It seems fitting here to point out that to assume a ventriloquist implicitly believes he is speaking to a living entity is a far-fetched notion. A noted psychiatrist, Dr. Edgar I. Lipton, in researching a case where one of his patient's hobbies was

ventriloquism, has written “to my knowledge there are no recorded cases of real ventriloquists getting confused about their identities versus their dummies, of going insane in this manner, or of using the dummy for evil purposes.”

Discussions of the split personality theory with a number of other psychiatrists and psychoanalysts have corroborated Dr. Lipton’s conclusions. Gee whiz fella’s, you sure took the fun out of it.

While some have put the fun back into ventriloquism others have been putting ventriloquism into their fun, even in the computer age, in fact, even in computer games. With its mysterious past and veil of secrecy, it is no surprise to view ventriloquism as a “power” or a “spell.” Its effects in cyber-games vary. In some, obtaining it allows only your group to talk together over great distances, without anyone who is not in your group hearing the conversation. In others, invoking the “spell” will cause all those logged on, but not participating in the game, to say something again and again. It works according to the imagination of the creator of the game, and may involve throwing the voice into improbable places. It echoes the quality of the Echo theory — the words travel silently and burst forth wherever the ventriloquist, or someone wielding the power of ventriloquy, wants, or makes others (appear to) say things they didn’t.

It is a testament to ventriloquism that through all the ups and downs it is still amusing people up close. It still appears in cabarets, on cruise ships and the stage. There are many who ply the trade in these venues. One gentleman has been quite successful at them all for years, both in front and behind the scenes as a “ventriloquist-puppeteer” which has included worldwide travel, television, film and cabaret. Todd Stockman’s diverse career has sent him to places from the Arctic Circle to South Africa headlining on luxurious ocean liners from 1987 to 1997, frequently taking his characters ashore for local performances, or helping to promote the artistry of the art in exhibits. When land-bound, at home in the United States, he’d work on television projects produced by Children’s Television Workshop, and Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood, and on many national commercials. He spans political parties, having appeared at the White House as a ventriloquist for both Presidents Carter and Bush. He trained with Frank Oz and puppeteered in *The Muppets Take Manhattan*. He served as Technical Advisor to the original New York City production of Nunsense and also to director Tim Robbins’ *The Cradle Will Rock* motion picture. He played the part of ventriloquist Max Morinsky in “His Masters Voice” a play about Thomas Edison’s impact on vaudeville, and received a rave notice in the New York Times for his work in “On the Lam” at Theater for the New City. He served as curator for exhibitions on ventriloquism and puppetry including: “The Puppets and Pointillism of Dick Weston” at the Las Vegas Art Museum in 1997, “Who Said That!?!: The Art of the Contemporary American Ventriloquist” at the Atlanta Center for Puppetry Arts in 1998-99 and works from the “Todd Stockman Collection” have appeared in prominent national museums including the Smithsonian Institution. To date, the Baltimore native has won four Manhattan of Association “MAC Awards,” a “Back

Stage Bistro Award," and the highest recognition awarded to an individual performer in the art of puppetry: "The Citation of Excellence - Founded by Jim Henson" by the Union Internationale de la Marionnette. (UNIMA) But that is only part of the story. Todd has been involved in many facets of the art and his act, reviews, awards of recognition and exhibits have brought positive attention to its value as an entertainment form.

Others who have done so have presented it as either a spoof or plot background. Woody Allen featured a small-time ventriloquist with a stutter in *Broadway Danny Rose*, with ventriloquist Herbie Reynolds in the part. I appeared as a Greenwich Village Nightclub performer with my dummy Bruce in *Desperately Seeking Susan* with Madonna, and also did an early radio ventriloquist bit, à la Edgar Bergen, for Allen's *Radio Days*.

It was those very "radio days" along with the medium promoted by Thomas Edison, which had a lasting and increasingly powerful impact on humanity in general and ventriloquism in particular. What the field needed was a producer who was also a ventriloquist; a person who respected the art would show it in a truer light. Enter Sandra Lukow.

Belly Talkers is a feature-length documentary on ventriloquism which shows us that aspect. Released in 1997, it was written and directed by film maker Sandra Lukow, who plays herself along with her longtime pal and co-star Pedro. It gives an accurate picture of the artists featured. They include such luminaries as Candice Bergen, David Copperfield, (who practiced the art as a youngster) Tim Selberg, Liz Von Seggen, Paul Winchell, Shari Lewis, Spencer Horsman, Dr. Tom Wilkinson, Willie Tyler, Jimmy Nelson, and this author, along with many of those attending the 21st International Ventriloquist ConVENTion sponsored by Vent Haven Museum. It is a small but important step in healing the damage of decades.

We need more positive media attention. It was particularly the screen of the cinema which became a shroud over the Golden Age of Vaudeville. Some of those very early funny and clever live acts have been preserved by early film makers who were paying a small fee to the performer to record their acts for later showing, though deterioration has taken its toll. Fortunately, not all movies depicted ventriloquists as insane, or their partners as maniacal mannequins. All of the old films, whether delightful or frightful, found fresh audiences shortly after the birth of television, and that trend continues today. Though there were films that harked back to the days of cheerful banter, there would never again be the innocence of the Golden Age. The flicker of the projector with its play of light and dark, image and shadow, positive and negative became a recurring theme in the portrayal and betrayal of genuine ventriloquists. Since stories, books, movies, and later, television shows, often depict a writer's most debased fantasies which are not based in reality, couldn't that mean the writer is mentally unstable? What is 'Fact?' What is 'Fiction?' Sometimes it's hard to tell.

What is not hard to tell is that movies and radio killed The Golden Age of Ventriloquism and the wondrous era of vaudeville. Writers and producers took real fact and turned it into reel fiction, and even surreal fiction. What really happened to vaudeville when it died? Be sure to stay tuned for the next thrilling chapter.

Chapter X
...To TV

"*When vaudeville died, TV was the box they buried it in.*"

Veteran vaudeville ventriloquist, turned radio comic, Fred Allen gave us that oft-quoted humorous epitaph. It was not quite true, and it did not happen immediately. The body was not on view for several years. It was radio that had started the decline in vaudeville attendance. Entire books have been written about the evolution of the media, but it is not the scope of this one. The development of early television is thoroughly and entertainingly covered in *Tube*, listed in the bibliography. Others cover the evolution and the transitions of the stars. Here we only mention some stage stars, such as Burns and Allen and Jack Benny, who had jumped ship, the sinking ship of vaudeville, taking their talking comedy acts to the radio airwaves, as did singers, and comics like that other Allen — Fred. Of course visual acts like jugglers, acrobats, eccentric dancers, magicians, and especially mimes couldn't, while most ventriloquists **thought** they couldn't. They stayed on as long as possible, but talking movies quickly took over the theaters and vaudeville soon disappeared from most of them. Soon after television proved viable, many radio stars made that transition too, but Fred Allen was not one of them, and he disliked the new medium. In fact he said something to the effect that they call it medium, because it is rare to find anything on it well done. Others, the visual acts, however held out until it became obvious that they were the last remnants of vaudeville, so they too sought refuge in the "box," a visual medium. When veteran vaudevillians went onto the small screen, vaudeville became "Vaudeo," a blend of the experienced trying the experimental. It gave new audiences that had missed the Golden Age, a golden opportunity to enjoy that delightful assortment of visual novelty acts which encompassed that wonderful, wonder-filled era. This narrative has jumped from

Ventriloquist
Fred Allen
and Jake

Fred Allen was born John Florence Sullivan. He purchased Jake, his first dummy, in 1915 and traveled with it to Australia. He was billed as "The World's Worst Juggler" and returned as a Monologist and Ventriloquist. He was first known professionally as Fred St. James, then Freddy James and finally Fred Allen.

vaudeville to television, because the story of ventriloquism and early radio is mostly the story of Edgar Bergen on radio. Over the years there have been others, including Paul Winchell, but Bergen was the first and most famous one, and that part of his phenomenal career is covered in "The Charlie Awards."

The first trial of a TV variety show, *Hour Glass*, was highly rated, proving to NBC that there was a solid place for "Vaudeo" in the fledgling television industry. It became the prototype of all the later comedy/variety shows, of which Berle led the pack, with others soon following on his heels, as in another Fred Allenism: "Imitation is the sincerest form of television."

Today, with few antennas remaining on roof tops and cable and satellite bringing us hundreds of channels of a virtually infinite array of program options with fancy graphics, instant replay, instant news from around the world and even beyond, twenty-four hours per day, reruns all the time along with the opportunity for us to tape shows for later viewing at our convenience, it is hard to imagine, or even recall, the early days of television. What were they like? They were simple. Options were limited. Most important to us is how ventriloquists fit into the scheme of things. How did they change television? How did television change them? In many ways, it seems. It was television that gave many of our finest fellow artists their best exposure.

The Nipkow disk required banks of powerful light bulbs, on three sides, to illuminate the subject to be scanned – in this case, John Logie Baird, the first person to transmit a picture, and two dummies in his laboratory. Though this system was later abandoned, powerful, and hot, lights would still be required during the early years of television.(Henley Publishing Company 1929)

Both the viewing screen and the viewing audience were small at first because television sets were based on small radar scope tubes and they were considered to be expensive toys for the affluent. In 1945 there were only about 10,000 sets in the entire country, which meant the New York City area because that was the center of broadcasting and just about the only place that received the signals. In its infancy TV offered only from one to approximately eight hours of programming per ***week***. About a year later advertising revenues had only reached $500,000. Clearly, cautious sponsors needed to be convinced that they were paying to support programs that were watched and therefore their commercials seen. The general public needed special inducements to plunk down hard cash for a big expensive glowing box with a four-inch picture that only provided a few hours of

diversion. Many of today's camcorders have viewfinders that are bigger and clearer than those early screens on televisions the size of a stove. Well-known stars were solicited to appear, in the hopes of increasing the number of sponsors and the size of the audience. But attracting top names was not easy either. There was a Catch 22 there. Who wants to be on a show that nobody is watching? And if they do watch, why should I appear on a show they don't pay for as they do in the theater?

For example, Bergen was one such star. Having already made the transition from nightclubs and vaudeville to radio, where he ruled the roost for many years, he had acquired millions of fans. Although wooed, he seemed reluctant to make yet another transition to the new medium of television, though he finally did. "Perhaps the biggest coup was the TV debut, on November 14, 1946, of ventriloquist Edgar Bergen (and Charlie McCarthy). This was one of the earliest instances of a top radio star bringing his act to television..."[39] That was Bergen's TV debut on *Hour Glass*, which was highly acclaimed, but that was it for him for the next ten years. One of the often debated questions in the trade is why the undisputed king of ventriloquists never enlarged his show business sphere and repeated on television the success he had achieved on radio. Though we may never know, it was alleged in the business that Bergen was afraid his years on radio had made him lazy and caused his ventriloquial lip technique to become too sloppy to withstand the heightened attention of the TV lens. His audience would notice his moving lips which would be distracting to them while detracting from his prestige. Those who knew Bergen personally insist that he had excellent control when he wished to, and knew enough about the mechanics of television to insist he and Charlie be "shot" separately, for the illusion. Others have recalled that, even when his mouth moved, his manipulations and voices of Charlie and friends were so charismatic, he faded into the background as the audience concentrated on Charlie's quips instead of Bergen's lips.

There are some fallacies in these opinions. Bergen and Charlie made many movies and comedy shorts, all of which included close-ups of the ventriloquist and his partner together. On the other hand, Bergen almost always moved his lips when his partners spoke. The fact is, he stated in one of our conversations, and in public interviews, that characterization, manipulation, and script were far more important than lip control. Perhaps he was right at that time, since he was the acknowledged master and didn't have to "prove himself." The man had achieved an unmatchable stardom on his own turf.

Possibly he and other stars were reluctant to try their hand at the new medium because it was more demanding and less forgiving than what they were used to. Radio allowed you to read your script, and movies allowed you to do retakes until you got it right. The legitimate theater usually had long rehearsal times and shows ran for a while. Like the theater, TV was live. However, even though cue cards were used, production was at a hectic pace, the shows were usually weekly and rehearsal times were short. Once you were on the air, there were no retakes or second chances and there was no place to hide. If you goofed, it would be seen by more people at one

time, than you had ever played to before for your entire theatrical life! Videotape recording, and the ability to edit out errors, or, for that matter, preserve outtakes for "Blooper" shows, would not appear until the early 1960s, [Baird did record television images thirty years earlier, which could not be edited] though filming and editing was a workable option. It was effectively employed by Lucy and Desi, serving as a major contributor to their sensational success, starting in 1951.

But the new medium was seen as one of immediacy and doing it live was the challenge, especially in the very early years, when, of course there were the blazing lights, inches from your face, needed for those early TV cameras. The intense, oppressive heat they produced was not a pleasant experience. Additionally, there was the strange makeup required, for a time, in order to look normal on TV, which, in person, was an unflattering, ugly purple!

The constant demand for new material also ran counter to past practices. Most established ventriloquists, vaudevillians in origin, performed their prize act repeatedly, thousands of times per year in cities across the country. After they tightened and heightened its appeal, through the grind of the vaudeville circuits, they had a successful act locked in place. The inimitable Marx Brother's best films were really their vaudeville acts put on film. Many vaudevillians could not or would not whip out new material and change their acts. Some feared that they had no control over how they would appear to the viewers. Their creative lives and careers were in the hands of television technicians. Others, who had achieved a certain professional and financial standing, did not feel the salaries offered were commensurate with their reputation.

Whatever combination of any or all of these factors, the result was that it left TV wide open for other, lesser-known, ventriloquists. In the very early, truly experimental days, it was up to newcomers, who felt they had nothing to lose and everything to gain, to pave the way.

There were no precedents. Everyone did their best to attract and hold the audience and both the performers and their shows were under close scrutiny. One very early instance of this was typified by Shirley Dinsdale. Like Bergen before her, she gave her partner top billing, a practice that others would also follow. She also named the show after her wooden sidekick and co-star, "Judy Splinters," another play on the woodenhead theme. They were dressed in the then popular western garb on her TV show. New York *Times* critic Jack Gould commented that neither she, nor her dummy, looked good in close-ups. He recommended that half the problem would be solved if Dinsdale used a prettier doll. On the other hand, *The Complete Directory To Prime Time Network TV Shows 1946 - Present,* says:

Popular Shirley Dinsdale and Judy Splinters

Pretty 21-year-old ventriloquist Shirley Dinsdale and her saucy, pigtailed dummy Judy Splinters hosted this live program, which served as the 1949 summer replacement for Kukla, Fran & Ollie. The program was first seen in February 1949 as a local entry on KNBH, Los Angeles, moved to Chicago for its summer network run, and then to New York for nine months a late afternoon show in 1949-1950.

It was a brief but significant network run. Its first telecast was June 13, 1949 and lasted until August 5, 1949 appearing on NBC Mon-Fri 7:00-7:15, just after dinner.

Three important points emerged from this. First, that then, as now, critics aren't necessarily right — NBC chose her for a major debut; becoming the first television personality, and ventriloquist, ever to be launched on a network. Second, the concept of awards started early in the new medium. The young Californian and her longtime wooden friend won the first TV Emmy award, in 1949, in the Children's TV Show category. "So there! Jack Gould!" [Shari Lewis would capture many, years later.]

Third, that critics had a better-than-front-row-seat or two on the aisle, and they would be judging quite carefully what they could now see up close. For everyone, television was theater with high powered binoculars plus radio's sound, at home.

Ventriloquism was at a turning point. Edgar Bergen had been king on radio. Not a big surprise, with 20/20 hindsight, considering that voice characterization and sound effects counted on radio, the rest was left to the imagination of the listeners. Yet here was television, a visual medium ideally suited to ventriloquism but there was something missing: a full-fledged situation comedy type show. Into this breech stepped Paul Winchell, but not without some experience, of course.

He was born in New York City on December 21, 1922, just three years before the first image on television, that of a dummy, would be transmitted. His parents were Sol Wilchen (note the sounds in the name reversed make up the stage name) and Clara (Fuchs).

Stricken by polio in his preteens, Winchell turned to hobbies to while away his days during his confinement in the hospital. However, he unexpectedly caught an incurable disease. He succumbed to "vent fever," when he invested a dime in the book, *How To Throw Your Voice*.

Later, Paul attended the School For Industrial Arts and, as fate would have it, had Jero Magon as his teacher. Mr. Magon, who also was an accomplished puppeteer, gave Paul's class a homework assignment — to create puppets for a project. Young Paul chose to build a ventriloquial doll. Thus was born Jerry Mahoney, named for his teacher, Jero Magon who was its inspiration.

When Mr. Magon saw Paul and his pal entertain at a school function, he was impressed. He encouraged Paul to audition for *The Major Bowes Original Amateur Hour*. Created in 1935, by Edward J. Bowes, a former major in Army intelligence in WWI, it became radio's most famous and popular talent contest for beginning

performers. Not all amateurs were good, or kept track of time, so the Major would strike a large gong to signal the abrupt end to their act. [The premise of the later *Gong Show*.] With the desire to be better than good, young Winchell made another investment in a 25¢ joke book to build a comedy routine. That 35¢ investment was the start of a lifetime career. With his act he won the $100 first prize, a very large sum in those days, and an extra bonus; the opportunity to join a touring vaudeville unit of *The Major Bowes Original Amateur Hour* winners. Doing a takeoff of Edgar Bergen, neophyte ventriloquist Paul Winchell traveled the country for a year, paying his show business dues, while becoming a polished professional. He later left the tour to complete his high school education, which served him well.

After WWII, in the mid 1940s, when the TV industry was young, but growing rapidly, daytime broadcasts merely consisted of a picture of a circular test pattern and a continuous tone, used to check reception by the thousands of technicians who were installing and adjusting the vast number of new TV sets and their roof antennas. Installation required the technician to securely mount and aim the antenna on the roof, connect a flat wire that went from the antenna, down a wall, into a window, along an inside wall to the back of the television set, and then use the test pattern with the tone to make several adjustments to secure a "clear" picture and clean sound. It was not an easy do-it-yourself job for just anybody. Actual shows came on briefly only in the late afternoon.

During the "Big Band Era," Winchell appeared with such musical notables as Tommy Dorsey, Glenn Miller, Woody Herman, Vaughn Monroe, and Ted Weems. Again following in Bergen's footsteps this tour paid off when he was given his own network radio show.

In the late 1940's entertainment programming didn't begin until about 4:00 P.M., providing an after-school alternative to active play and homework. He appeared on an episode of an anthology series ported over from radio, *Lights Out*, on NBC TV. By the turn of the decade throughout the late 1960s network TV slowly expanded to include early morning and what we now know as prime time, and in particular Saturday morning programs for children, then into late night, as well.

Paul Winchell and Jerry

In 1947, TV advertising revenues passed the one million dollar mark. It was ready to deliver an audience and Winchell felt he was ready to try his hand at the infant medium. He appeared on *The Bigelow [Tea Company] Show*, a variety show, which moved around a bit. From October 1948 to July 1949, it was on NBC Thursday evenings 9:30-10:00, then from October 1949 to December 1949, on CBS Wednesday evenings from 9:00-9:30. The two regulars were Paul and Dunninger. Paul threw voices and Dunninger caught thoughts on the show they shared. That Dunninger was the first TV mentalist prior to (The Amazing) Kreskin decades later, may explain why he is given more space here. Yet Joseph Dunninger was no stranger to ventriloquism either. In 1929 he was listed as the author of *Mystery Book: Popular Magic & Card Tricks*, No. 3. It was published by Experimental Publishing, Inc. and included a chapter on ventriloquism.

This two-part program featured the ventriloquist Paul Winchell and his dummy Jerry Mahoney in one segment, and mental telepathist Dunninger in another. Winchell and Mahoney did a regular weekly comedy routine, sometimes with the aid of a guest star. Dunninger's act consisted of reading the minds of members of the studio audience or special guests, and sometimes other tricks, always with a noted personality present to judge the honesty of the performance; he had a standing offer of $10,000 to anyone who could prove that he used an accomplice. In one telecast a United States Congressman was shown on the steps of the Capitol in Washington, while from New York Dunninger read his mind—via split screen. (*The Complete Directory....*)

November 2, 1950, marks the debut of color TV broadcasting, but sets were expensive and programing limited. It would be several years before it took hold. In the meantime some people put tinted plastic on their black and white screens.

However, Winchell knew that more could be accomplished with the look and content of a ventriloquial show than the standard old dummy-on-the-knee format. He sensed this new medium called for an original approach.

He kept exploring the potentials of TV and received an opportunity to apply fresh ideas with the debut of his first prime-time program. In 1950, *The Paul Winchell-Jerry Mahoney Show* showcased Winchell in a weekly series of musical and comedy skits, complete with storyline and novelty acts.

To further enhance the impression that Jerry and Knucklehead were flesh and blood performers, rather than wood and sap dummies they were integrated with a resident company of human actors. There were also guest stars including such film luminaries as Sir Cedric Hardwick, Bela Lugosi, Walter Slezak and Peter Lorre.

There was precedent for this. Burr Tilstrom and Fran Allison on *Kukla, Fran and Ollie* combined puppets and people, but Paul did it without the puppet stage, and used his vent skills to have them talk. On the other hand, he was an innovator. While Fred Russell had worked a live hand into the arm of a dummy, on stage, Paul made it a feature on his TV Show giving Jerry and Knuck two live-action hands each, which enhanced the illusion that they were real boys. The figures were usually positioned against a scenery wall, seated on a couch or a high-backed chair. These served to mask a hidden assistant whose arms and white-gloved hands pushed through holes in the walls and furniture, right into the sleeves of the dummies' costumes. The hidden assistant gestured to match the dialogue, or handled items, which made the figures appear animated. Paul could even step away because another assistant would manipulate the head and pull the string to operate the mouth in synch with the dialogue provided by Winchell. Practically the only thing Jerry and Knucklehead couldn't do was walk around. When you think of the later Muppets on *Sesame Street* and *The Muppet Show,* featuring guest stars, and puppets with live-action hands, even without the ventriloquism, you'll appreciate that Paul's extensive utilization of this technique was ahead of his time. When someone who is old enough

thinks of 1950s and ‘60s Paul Winchell and his pals immediately come to mind, especially for ventriloquists, many of whom were inspired by his TV shows. *The Paul Winchell Jerry Mahoney Show* and *Winchell - Mahoney Time* were eagerly anticipated by countless young fans every week. Everyone wanted to see what antics they were up to. His books on ventriloquism helped his fans to get started. He even started Carol Burnett on her TV career in 1955 when she made her debut as Jerry Mahoney's girlfriend on the popular Saturday morning program.

In the era of early TV, before tape or film, *The Paul Winchell and Jerry Mahoney* show was performed “live” in front of a studio audience of varying ages which included children and their parents. In order to satisfy the humor appetites of such a wide age range, Paul relied on a smorgasbord of laugh-getting devices and surprises. He knew that the very young children who might not understand his verbal jokes would enjoy the visual gags such as funny faces, pies in the face and pratfalls. One early skit caused a momentary panic and taught Winchell and his crew to be more selective of the subject matter.

The studio audience and the kids at home saw Jerry sitting on a big chair. He starts to read and raises an oversized book entitled, *How To Become An Invisible Man*,[40] which now hides his head. In front of Jerry is a table upon which rests a glass filled with some sort of concoction Jerry had supposedly mixed with his chemistry set. The people next heard Jerry say, “Now... let’s see. I drink this potion I mixed.” Jerry’s gloved hand is seen picking up the glass and taking it behind the book. He supposedly drinks it and we hear amplified sounds of a swallow and his reaction to the taste. “Yiiiccchhh... that’s awful. I sure hope it works.” Surely, drinking such a mixture would be a red flag today. Then he wonders, “Hmmm.. now I’m supposed to be invisible.”

He first puts down the empty glass and then the big book of instructions. The joke here is that, while *we* can plainly see that it must have worked, because we can’t see his head, Jerry mutters, “Hmmm, that’s funny! I don’t *feel* any different. Aw shucks... guess it didn’t work.” He kept talking as though nothing happened, but Paul was shocked and Jerry reacted to his look of disbelief. Of course, under cover of the book, his head was removed from the body to achieve the effect of “invisibility” and to get a laugh. The laugh was on the staff because the children failed to get the joke! They were visibly upset and began to shout, “Look, Jerry’s head is gone!” The director hurriedly cut to a commercial as the parents reassured the children that Jerry was okay and it was only make-believe. Who knows what panic engulfed the unaccompanied children at home alone in front of their TV babysitter? After returning from the commercial Jerry’s head was seen to be restored to its original smiling self and, as Sherry (Sherwin) Cloth, longtime writer on the show and my friend commented, “We all learned a valuable lesson.”

Winchell went on to become the inspiration for a whole new generation of ventriloquists. He is also quite a versatile fellow. Besides being a ventriloquist, he is an actor, director, writer, inventor — he invented an artificial heart — a kind of

renaissance man. During that era he worked with the top names of the day. He would appear with Milton Berle, or rather on his show with a cardboard cutout which is standing in for him while he is on vacation. It was *The Buick-Berle Show* of December 29, 1954 and Winchell was well recognized. Berle was a pioneer too.

Milton Berle was the first major star to move over to early television and was a major influence in putting vaudeville in the box. But it was not a death, it was a rebirth. Studio audiences attending his shows were given handouts that called it *The Texaco Star Theater Vaudeville Show*. With that variety venue, *The Texaco Star Theater*, as it was more widely known on television, "Uncle Miltie" ruled the (air) waves on Tuesday nights. His jokes, skits, and zany antics helped to keep families, especially the kids, up late, while selling millions of televisions. Other variety shows quickly followed his success. Thus in 1952, with Paul Winchell already a triumph on the tube, Berle hired talented Jimmy Nelson and his inanimate cohorts to portray uniformed service station attendants on his show. Instantly, Nelson gained national exposure. He also became the first ventriloquist ever to do a television commercial. You just know that they were eagerly awaited by his many fans!

Disconcerted parents beseeched Milton Berle to help get their overstimulated kids to go to bed after his show. On air he asked them to please go to bed for "Uncle Miltie" and it stuck.

Jimmy Nelson with Danny O'Day (left) and Humphrey Higsbye (right)

Paul and his partners, Jerry Mahoney and Knucklehead Smiff, also appeared on such early TV shows as:

> *All Star Revue* a Comedy Variety show of the early '50s. It featured Ed Wynn (1950-1952) Danny Thomas (1950-1952) Jack Carson (1950-1952) Jimmy Durante Martha Raye (1951-1953) George Jessel (1952-1953) Tallulah Bankhead (1952-1953) This Variety series originally featured a rotating roster of four famous comedians — Ed Wynn, Danny Thomas, Jack Carson, and Jimmy Durante — who alternated as hosts. First known as Four Star Revue, the series was retitled All Star Revue in the fall of 1951 when a number of additional entertainers began to headline episodes. Among them were Martha Raye (who starred in four episodes), Olson & Johnson, Spike Jones, Victor Borge, Bob Hope, the Ritz Brothers, and Paul Winchell. During the summer of 1952 there was no regular star and **the program adopted a vaudeville flavor**, with both new and established performers appearing. This summer version was titled All Star Summer Revue. (*The Complete Directory....*) [Emphasis added]

Bessie Mack was Secretary to Major Bowes. She knew all about the business. So did her son, Ted, who visited quite often. Years later, when the Major retired and there was an opportunity to move the *Original Amateur Hour* to TV, in 1948, Bessie and her son, Ted Mack, took over.

During those inaugural, fast-paced ten years, the programming day expanded beyond a mere hour... beyond the afternoon to encompass nearly the whole day. Many other changes were afoot. Performers of stature and a new crop of entertainers found that television had turned the entertainment industry upside down. Variety shows were no longer experimental, they were expected. Where attending a vaudeville show had been a special occasion, perhaps once-a-week at best, TV offered an almost daily supply of amusement. The big rush to television started in January of 1948 with *Ted Mack's Original Amateur Hour*, then in June with Berle on *The Texaco Star Theater,* and Ed Sullivan's *Toast of the Town,* and finally in December *Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts* joined the fray. The entertainment explosion continued with the *DuMont Cavalcade of Stars* and *The Colgate Comedy Hour* going on the air. Because they presented the cream of the crop on the 'box,' audiences became accustomed to ever-changing stimulation. As programming increased and prices for televisions came down, more and more sets were sold and hooked up to antennas to receive the entertainment manna from out of thin air. Rooftops became thick forests of antennas all pointed to their mecca of television transmission, the Empire State Building which stood amidst, yet aloof from, the rest of New York City surrounding it.

Guess who these famous faces are.

For performers, it was a time of survival of the fittest as viewers and producers were becoming more sophisticated and more selective. Vaudeville entertainers who had developed one or two acts they used for several tours across the country, could be seen by all their potential audiences at once. Like radio before it, television too devoured material like an insatiable monster. Winchell and others employed a full-time staff of writers. Television was more expensive than radio to produce. Like the polyphonists and ventriloquists of ages ago, who did not use a dummy, radio scenes were created by the words along with sound effects which were combined in the imaginations of the listeners. On the other hand, television required construction of actual sets and props. Advertisers were needed to pay for "free" TV. People began to watch more television reasoning, "Why pay to see the same old things in a theater, when television showed the best free of charge?" The success of the early variety shows naturally resulted in more and more variety shows which people could watch from their or their neighbor's home, resulting in fewer and fewer live showplaces to perform in, as still more and more sets were sold to those who not only did not want to bother to go to the theater, but did not even want to go to their neighbor. The number of shows and channels increased in a manner that was not to be seen again until the cable and satellite revolution in broadcasting, nearly thirty years later.

The most famous and longest running one was started, or rather converted, by Ed Sullivan. He was a New York *Daily News* columnist who had earlier branched out to produce a vaudeville revue, *Ed Sullivan and His Dawn Patrol*. It was a collection of New York nightclub and vaudeville acts, song writers and personalities who had toured in the 1930s. This amalgam which played the Loew's vaudeville theater circuit, East side, West side and all around the town was resurrected and updated for TV where it became *The Toast of the Town*. With his prominence in the press and on the small screen, it eventually became *The Ed Sullivan Show*, remaining for a record 23 years (1948-1971) on CBS which later named the Broadway theater after him.

As the venerable variety show host, he provided a major outlet and showcase for both seasoned and fledgling performers. He was a columnist, not a showman. Though lacking the charisma of an "emcee," his clumsy, "everyman" attitude appealed to his devoted audiences. His demeanor was a bland blend of pro and amateur that never quite gained polish in all the years he was on the air. Many people and books have included his mistakes, including Bennet Cerf. Some have panned Sullivan and repeated the quotes of others, but perhaps it was best said by Peter Hay in his excellent book, *Canned Laughter - The Best Stories from Radio and Television*, published by the prestigious Oxford University Press, in 1992, under the unflattering heading, "Mr. Rigor Mortis":

> More barbs were hurled at Ed Sullivan and his show, The Toast of the Town (frequently parodied as "The Toast of the Tomb"), than perhaps at any other television entertainer. Sullivan's enduring success, despite his stiff posture, unsmiling expression, awkward mannerisms, and frequent fluffs, greatly puzzled some of his fans, but especially insiders. Fred Allen, not given to professional animosity or jealousy, seemed genuinely offended by Sullivan's lack of talent. "He's a pointer," he once said, "and you can teach a dog to point. Just rub meat on the target." Sullivan, who had an audience of 35 million viewers, retorted: "Maybe Fred should rub some meat on his sponsor. Fred Allen hit back at the stony-faced master of ceremonies: "Ed Sullivan will be a success as long as other people have talent.

But Fred Allen never pursued television and enough other people did have talent to keep Sullivan on the tube for quite some time, doing what he did, the way he did it. Famed comedian Alan King best summed it up when he once said of Sullivan, "He doesn't do anything, but he does it better than anyone else." What he did was bring the best acts, with something for everyone, into the homes of the average family. Fortunately, Sullivan seemed to favor ventriloquists, presenting the "name" practitioners of the day over and over as well as giving others a chance to be seen by a nationwide audience. Perhaps he was bending over backwards, to make amends for his published slight at The Great Lester, and the profession, many years before. [See "The Golden Age"] Among the notables he had on his show were: Shari Lewis; Paul

Bob Evans

Winchell; Bob Evans and Jerry O'Leary, a dummy noted for his high-pitched singing; the elegant Clifford Guest, author and popular polyphonist famed for his acoustic illusion that permitted the audience to believe it was hearing a fox hunt in progress, including howling hounds and galloping horses, and his crying baby routine; Arthur Worsley, a deadpan ventriloquist whose dummy, Charlie Brown, did all the talking as Worsley stared nonchalantly at the audience (à la The Great Lester), the unforgettable Señor Wences and his hand-made partner [See "The Charlie Awards"] and such reliable standbys as Ricky Layne, and the inimitable Jay Marshall, a southpaw comedy ventriloquist/magician with his creation, "Lefty," a talking "hand" rabbit, who was born of necessity.

Jay Marshall and Lefty

When Marshall received his draft notice during World War II, he realized that he could not take his conventional dummies with him. Since he hoped to continue performing while in the service, Marshall was determined to create a portable partner, devising a cute puppet out of a white glove. Adding some buttons made a nose and eyes, and — presto — a pocketable partner. After the war, he modified the glove by snipping off two fingers and sewing them straight up onto the sides of the "face," where they became long bunny ears. Known from then on, as the "funny, bunny man" he and Lefty (so named because he is worn on that hand) were seen on Sullivan's show scores of times, enjoyed by young and old alike. In their classic routine Lefty sings "If I Had My Way, Dear," mangling the lyrics, while Jay, in an effort to help him, only makes matters worse. Debonair Marshall, attired in a white tie and tails, appeared with Lefty at chic supper clubs throughout the States as well as England. In 1993, his vast knowledge of the art and history of magic and allied subjects, earned him the title of "Dean of Magicians."

Times surely had changed. The technological marvel of television was a magic window that revived two almost forgotten ideas. The talking hand and the talking glove which had lost some favor nearly a century earlier because they could not be easily seen by a large audience, now could be seen by the largest audience ever, just as if they were standing on the stage next to the ventriloquist! The hilarity and popularity of both Jay Marshall and Señor Wences were surely proof of that.

The year 1956 was a banner one for ventriloquists. Paul Winchell hosted *Circus Time*, a variety show with a circus theme. It was first broadcast on October 4, 1956 and it lasted until June 27, 1957 on ABC Thursdays, from 8:00-9:00:

REGULARS: Betty Ann Grove (1957) Ralph Herman Orchestra. This variety show with the flavor of a traditional circus presented both circus performers and traditional entertainment acts. Paul Winchell was the "ringmaster-host," assisted by his dummies Jerry Mahoney and Knucklehead Smith. [*sic*] Guests included popular music acts such as Mickey and Sylvia and the Dell Vikings. (*The Complete Directory....*)

Famous partners switch, on an episode of *Circus Time.* They each manipulated, and also mimicked the voice for, their "new" partners!

Winchell and Nelson switched partners on an episode of that show and provided the voice for the "other" figure! That same year, and after ten years of avoiding television, Edgar Bergen, Charlie McCarthy, Mortimer Snerd, and Effie Klinker, hosted a minor game show called, *Do You Trust Your Wife?*" It lasted a year. Bergen then limited his television exposure to occasional guest spots on TV variety shows, including his last major appearance on the highly acclaimed, *The Muppet Show*. His place in the galaxy of show business stars has never been challenged, remaining intact to this day — and almost synonymous with ventriloquism.

When Bergen left, the show was changed to *Who Do You Trust?* hosted by a clever, funny, young master-of-ceremonies and former magician/ventriloquist named Johnny Carson. This was Carson's springboard to an unprecedented, never to be duplicated thirty years of phenomenal recognition and success on *The Tonight Show*. Carson launched other ventriloquists on his show, most notably Ronn Lucas.

Meanwhile, Ed Sullivan's ever-popular, long-running show continued to spotlight veteran vents as well as provide national exposure for those not so well known. One such unknown was the outrageous Ricky Layne with his ethnic, Jackie Mason-sounding dummy, Velvel (The Yiddish name for William). Layne gratefully credited velvet-voiced Nat King Cole with discovering him and boosting his career. Late in 1955, Layne was appearing at Ciro's, a well-known, glamorous Hollywood night club on the famous Sunset Strip. He followed singer Maria (Mrs. Nat) Cole. Her famous husband came to the club each night to escort her home, arriving in the middle of Ricky's routine. Cole could not help but notice the audiences' favorable reaction. He, too, was so

Ricky Layne on *The Ed Sullivan Show*

entertained and impressed that he took it upon himself to call Sullivan to suggest, almost insist, the maestro book the ventriloquist. Sullivan was reluctant, informing Cole that he never hired an unknown, sight-unseen. Cole was not easily dissuaded. He was so excited about Ricky Layne's act that he offered Sullivan a proposition; "If Ricky Layne doesn't do well, I'll pay him myself or appear gratis on your show."

That was a deal Sullivan couldn't turn down, and the reassurance he needed. On New Year's Day, 1956, Ricky and Velvel debuted on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. When the audience heard the dummy with a Yiddish accent refer to the Irish Ed Sullivan as "Mr. Solomon," they laughed uproariously. Ricky Layne won immediate acclaim. However, the use of a Yiddish accent did create comment. Fortunately, a sense of humor prevailed, inasmuch as none of the jokes were racist or denigrating. When it was disclosed that Ricky Layne himself was Jewish, Velvel, accent and all, was accepted and the pair was hailed as a major hit on this extraordinarily popular show. Ricky and his friends spent that night celebrating his success.

The next morning, after that stupendous show and all the partying, Ricky was roused from a near stupor by a congratulatory phone call from none other than Ed Sullivan. But he was in no mood for what he thought was a practical joke. He mistakenly assumed that the call was from his friend, Will Jordan, the gifted mimic whose impersonation of Ed Sullivan was the model for other impressionists, and in fact, even for Ed Sullivan, who adopted or exaggerated some of them himself.

Rickety Ricky painfully told the caller, "Quit the clowning, Will!"...and hung up. Aware of what Ricky must have been thinking, an amused Sullivan called again. Reassuring him that he was indeed the real McCoy and not a copy, Sullivan asked Ricky to return to the show, two weeks later. This was fantastic! Once again he would be launched into the homes of millions of viewers.

On the appointed Sunday night all his friends, family, and potential bookers waited at home to see Ricky and Velvel on the TV set. Meanwhile the duo, ready, willing and able, anxiously waited offstage on the studio set.

All was not that simple. Along with fans who were lucky enough to get tickets, Sullivan's audiences always had celebrities and other noteworthy personalities

Ed Sullivanquishers:

At one time or another, well known personalities, on the air so often, are bound to make mistakes. Sullivan was only one of many who did, though perhaps more often than most. It was not personal, he did not do it on purpose. For readers who do not remember him, here is a sample of his on-air goofs. There have been many such collections, but among the best are those collected by Kermit Schafer For example:

Bloopers, Bloopers, Bloopers
By Kermit Schafer
Foreword by Mike Douglas
Bell Publishing Company, New York
Drawings by Doug Anderson

Sullivan, talking briefly to Jack Jones after his spot on the Sunday night TV program, asked, "Wasn't Alan Jones your father?" "He still is," snapped the Jones boy.

While he loved to introduce stars or personalities in his audience, they were not immune from his goofs either. During one of them he blooped the following: "Sitting out in our audience is talented Dolores Gray, currently starving on Broadway."

Closing out his Sunday night TV program, he found a few seconds to do a quick public service message. He closed his show, "And now a word about tuberculosis... Good night, everybody.... help stamp out TV"

It didn't happen, and he lasted twenty-three years!

sprinkled about. In a form of visual name-dropping, Sullivan would add some spice to the evening by introducing these worthies, all of whom needed no introduction since they were well recognized, to his viewers at home. A spotlight would be shone on them, they might stand or smile and wave, and occasionally say a few words. Sullivan was even wont to interrupt an act in order to give his show business friends the limelight. Though it always cut into the time allotted the variety acts, and some might not get to perform, he felt he made up for the intrusion by paying the performer anyway, and granting another date, in the future. Though disappointed, most would accept their fate graciously. So, while Ricky watched the clock, Sullivan killed time by introducing one celebrity after another.

It was inevitable: time ran out. At the last commercial break, Sullivan, true to form, broke the news to Ricky: Sorry, but the show was in its closing sixty seconds of air time and two stars are waiting to be introduced, we'll have you come back soon. Ricky responded, "Only a minute? I'll take it!" He volunteered to "introduce" the remaining stars in the audience, actor Fred MacMurray and his recent bride, June Haver. As the stars stood facing the camera, Velvel, in full Yiddish accent, announced, "Ledddies and ginelemin, Fred Mercurochrome and June Halvah." With just seconds to go he had detonated everyone — the audience, Sullivan, MacMurray and wife, all of whom burst into gales of laughter.

The impertinent Ricky Layne had so pleased the audience that the equally impressed Sullivan more than tripled the ventriloquist's salary. Thanks to Nat King Cole, and Ricky's superb talent, that second, or rather sixty-second, chance turned into thirty-nine appearances.

Not going on after enduring a long wait is one thing, being cut off during your act, is quite another. The Sullivan Syndrome of miscues and bad timing hit Jimmy Nelson. During his initial appearance on the show, Nelson was winding up an uproariously funny routine with his brilliant, rapid rendition of *Ragmop*. In this classic piece, he and his two different-voiced dummies split the lyrics three ways, a technically difficult feat that usually received an enthusiastic response.

At one point he takes a quick breath before the even faster finale. At this strategic split second, Ed Sullivan, for no apparent reason, or mistakenly thinking the routine was over, walked on stage, and in view of the camera, casually told the audience, "Okay, that was young Jimmy Nelson. Give him a hand." He then applauded a stunned Nelson off the stage.

Backstage, after learning what he had done, Sullivan apologized for his goof. To atone for the faux pas, Sullivan booked him back on the show, the following week, and made certain Nelson ended with his *pièce de résistance*.

While Jimmy Nelson is considered a wholesome family performer, beloved by both adults and children alike, it is interesting to note that he gained his early experience with crude audiences. He played the "low joints," rough bars and nightclubs commonly referred to as "Buckets of Blood." These alcoholic danger zones along Chicago's tough South side presented four shows a night. Whenever a

soldier, sailor, or uncivil civilian staggered in, the owner would shout, “Showtime!” The performer would then bounce on stage and try to amuse the nearly catatonic or noisy catcalling customers. It was good training for young Jimmy Nelson. These rough and abrasive crowds helped him smooth and polish his material.

It’s ironic that he proved himself on 80 proof patrons because of the way he got his start. At a church bingo game his Aunt Margaret won a toy ventriloquist’s dummy called “Dummy Dan” instead of the first prize which she had set her heart on — a bottle of scotch. Disappointed, she gave it to her ten-year-old nephew Jimmy, and he was thrilled. Jimmy dedicated himself to learning ventriloquism, receiving much encouragement from his father, who built a better body for the figure. Jimmy took lessons from retired Chicago policeman and vaudeville ventriloquist, Herman Stoike.

Fortunately for Jimmy, Chicago was also a hotbed of ventriloquism. Interestingly, both Edgar Bergen and later Jimmy, attended the same school, Lake View High. Convinced that Jimmy was sincere in his desire to become a professional ventriloquist, his father prevailed upon Frank Marshall, dean of dummy-makers, to attend one of Jimmy’s performances and evaluate his talent. Marshall was impressed with Jimmy’s skill and gave them his opinion regarding the dummy. They agreed to Frank’s suggestions and he set to work. The result, Danny O’Day, named after “Dummy Dan,” evolved into a wisecracking kid with a falsetto voice.

Years later Nelson found a small stuffed dog abandoned on a piano in a Wichita, Kansas nightspot. He picked up the stray animal, ad-libbed a timid, soft-spoken voice for the doleful dog, and got his laughs. Developing the character further, he named it “Farfel,” an appellation a piano player had bestowed on Jimmy himself. It was Yiddish for “Little Noodle,” probably descriptive of lanky young Jimmy. Nelson liked the sound, and passed it on. It seemed to be a perfect description for the pleasantly peculiar pooch. With that stuffed dog as a basis, Frank Marshall made duplicates that would be up to professional standards which could withstand constant use. Farfel, besides being cuddly and lovable, has another wonderful quality — he never needs to be walked!

While Nelson had been seen on the Berle and Sullivan shows, it was his stint as spokesman for Nestles Chocolate that catapulted him into the ventriloquial hall of fame. No, that’s not a typo, the Nestle Company has since dropped the last “s” but that’s the way it was presented and those who heard it then will always remember it just that way. Starting in 1956, and for the next decade, every Saturday morning, kids and parents enjoyed hearing Danny O’Day squeak out his song, “N-E-S-T-L-E-S, Nestles makes the very best...” Followed by Farfel’s famous finish; a basso yawning, “Chaaaaawklit!” delivered with just the right amount of melancholia and boredom, ending with the trademark snap of the jaw.

Incidentally, at the 1997 Las Vegas Ventriloquist ConVENTion, Peerless Jimmy told an enthralled audience of his peers this behind-the-scenes story. While he was performing the Nestles commercial with Farfel under the intensely hot studio lights of those early days, his hands became slippery from perspiration. As he lost his grip

on Farfel's lower jaw, it just snapped shut. It proved to be a very profitable accident. The sponsor loved it, and so have generations of fans.

These memorable commercials appeared on many Saturday morning juvenile shows; *The Lone Ranger*, *Sky King*, (Newsman Mike Wallace at one time was an announcer for the show) *The Mighty Mouse Playhouse* and *The Roy Rogers Show*, but his television appearances were by no means limited to commercials, or *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Jimmy did guest spots on *Jackie Gleason's Cavalcade of Stars*, and stints on the game shows, *Quick As A Flash*, *Bank On The Stars*, *Come Closer*, and *Down You Go*.

The author, standing, with Jimmy sitting in his office.

Although no longer in the national arena, Nelson and Co. were hired to do a series of television ads by First Federal Savings & Loan of Ft. Myers, Florida. A ventriloquist with two dummies, promoting a savings and loan, would hardly seem to fit in with the banking industry's stereotypical stodgy image. However, Jimmy was still a top drawer draw who made the campaign a bottom-line success. It resulted in his being taken on staff as Assistant Vice President - Marketing and Public Relations. Though a busy executive, he continued to make public appearances. He has since retired from that position and appears less frequently now. He was given the well- deserved Askins Award at the 1998 Las Vegas Ventriloquist Convention, [later renamed "Festivals"] in recognition for all his contributions to the art, and for being an inspiration to many.

There were so many shows for Nestles/Nelson commercials to appear on because producers realized that parents of small children considered television to be an excellent babysitter. Youngsters who were tethered to the tube by the strings on puppets, the most famous of which is Howdy Doody, or lured by dummies, would clamor for the sponsor's products.

Television was such an attraction to youngsters that everyone wanted to be in the studio audience, or the Peanut Gallery on Howdy Doody. Shows were also developed along the lines of the amateur radio programs where the kids themselves could become the stars!

Young Angela Martin, a perky performer, began her ventriloquial career at the age of eight on the celebrated amateur showcase *Star Time*. Whether or not it is intended, the title contains a play on words. This New York based "cradle" of entertainment offered talented child performers their "Start" to becoming a "star." Angela graduated to appearances on such network pinnacles as *The Ed Sullivan Show* and *The Jackie Gleason Show*. She continued to pursue her vocal vocation, her first

love, and also became a talented songwriter and dancer appearing in numerous Broadway productions.

There were some national and several local shows in North America, which featured, or were even hosted by, ventriloquists. In 1954, ventriloquist Jimmy Weldon talked turkey with his duck dummy on NBC's *Webster Webfoot*. Doris Faye appeared on DuMont's *Wonderama*, as Princess Ticklefeather, with her girl dummy dressed as an Indian.

When Canadian Cy Leonard appeared on a show called *The Big Revue*, it made him the first vent ever to appear on Canadian TV. Later he worked with Bobby Ash, known as Uncle Bobby, on his kid's show on the CTV network for fifteen years, (as did Valentine Vox, the author) working backstage as a puppeteer doing five voices in rapid changes and out front with his McElroy figure, Happy, a character with lots of movements and a nose that lights up. There was one visit from Ramdas Padhye, renowned in India. Leonard also appeared on B*ozo's Circus* in Chicago a number of times. He and W. S. Berger visited occasionally and corresponded regularly, decades before e-mail.

Cy Leonard with Happy and Edgar Bergen

Success in the arena of children's TV was a mixed blessing for some, who discovered it could be stigmatizing. Ventriloquists somehow became typecast as "strictly for kids." Booking agents considered them a novelty for youngsters, as opposed to a variation on a comedy act. As a result, leading performers who had appealed to the adult field were out in left field. Doris Faye's saga is detailed in the chapter on Women.

Another prominent example of such pigeonholing was Jimmy (Nestles) Nelson who started in nightspots and gained fame on Berle's adult variety show. He said, "I never considered myself a kiddie entertainer." Unfortunately, due to his countless commercials for Nestles chocolate, many agents did.

Unlike those who were dismayed by, or resented, the typecasting, children's entertainer Shari Lewis rather enjoyed the label. At the age of nineteen, Shari was about to appear on the *Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts TV Show* contest. Once again they turned to Dick Bruno for some last minute coaching and she won, was awarded three appearances on his show, and her career was launched.

Shari's nightclub act, here with with Fred Astaire

Shari's nightclub act, dancing with a chorus line.

She created her own TV show, *Fun Facts* (1953), a humorous educational program. That was followed by *Shari And Her Friends*, (1954), Her "friends" were traditional, hardwood dummies, or a redesigned "Willie Talk" doll. In 1956, CBS asked her to join *The Captain Kangaroo Show*. She introduced other characters, such as "Charlie Horse" and "Hush Puppy." She later hosted her own shows again; *Hi Mom* (1958) and *The Shari Lewis Show* (1960). By 1958 both Shari and TV had "come of age." That year, TV ad revenues topped the

one billion dollar mark, and no more 78 RPM records would ever be made, the 33 RPM High Fidelity, LP (Long Playing) record became the norm, for nearly thirty-five years.

Years later, Shari left the field of children's entertainment for a lucrative nightclub career, and still later returned to television, in 1992, with the winning, *Lamb Chop's Playalong*. She continues to please a second generation of audiences everywhere with her fists of fun.

TV enjoyed a small renaissance during the 1950s, a miniature golden age for ventriloquists. Bergen, Winchell and Lewis had their own shows, Nelson was everywhere, and Sullivan was giving others regular exposure. Even the *Lassie* TV show featured an episode with a "Mr. Ventrilo," a down-on-his-luck ventriloquist played by Ted Knight. In "The Puppet" (03/29/1959) Lassie falls in love with Mr. Ventrilo's hand puppet. Ted Knight (Tadeus Wladzslaw Konopka) actually did start his career as a ventriloquist.

Likewise, Bob McAllister, the star of the highly rated kids TV show *Wonderama*, (from 1967). A native of Philadelphia who grew up in Norfolk, Va, he started out as a ventriloquist and often worked with his buddy, Chauncey, on the early shows. He got the figure, at age ten, for improving his poor grades.

Funnyman Don Knotts started out as a ventriloquist doing nightclubs.

It was not just generosity to use ventriloquists, it was good business because they were entertaining. However, after that brief renaissance, ventriloquists only graced the screen occasionally, as part of ongoing shows. Here are some examples.

Stu Gilliam billed himself more as a comedian. He was at one time a Ham Radio Operator, Call sign, KI6M. He made three mono comedy albums: *Stu Gilliam At the Basin St. West, Black Astronaut, Wild Wicked Humor*. He appeared on TV with *Dean Martin Presents The Golddiggers*, a 1968 summer show (June 20 - September 5).

Both Shari Lewis and Paul Winchell were teamed up on the *Love, American Style* omnibus show as two very shy (and real) ventriloquists. They meet in a Broadway agent's office where their dummies flirt with each other. Of course, a while later, with the ice broken, their manipulators go out for coffee together, leaving their little friends sitting on the couch. But there is a twist at the end, when the figures, now alone, snuggle up.

Paul Winchell has always prided himself on his acting abilities. One of his favorite characters was a gray-haired old codger he named Grandpa Winchell, an older version of himself. Winchell was once booked to play the part of a senior citizen, in a scene on the *Love American Style* TV series. It was a role he was quite comfortable with. As a gesture of affection to his wooden friend, he listed himself in the closing credits as none other than "Paul Mahoney."

One cruise aboard *The Love Boat* included two estranged 'ventriloquists'(not really) among the passengers. Sid Caesar and Ruth Buzzi are surprised to see each other on board. Since they refuse to speak to one another, their dolls do the talking and arguing for them. Naturally, the team manages to become reunited just before the closing credits.

The Bob Newhart Show (1972 -1978) depicted the life of Bob Hartley, a Chicago psychologist, and his wife Emily, played by Suzanne Pleshette.. In one episode, entitled "A Jackie Story " a ventriloquist and his dummy turn to Bob for counseling when the dummy threatens to break up their winning team.

The Jeffersons situation comedy once had George Jefferson, played by Sherman Hemsley, deciding to invest in the stock market. The broker he contacted turned out to be ventriloquist Willie Tyler, whose stock tips were supplied by his small, and wily, partner, Lester. Willie Tyler also appeared on the *Lola Falana Show*, and was a regular on *Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In* hit comedy during the 1972/73 season.

Willie Tyler and Lester (right) with Sammy Davis Jr. on *Laugh-In*, 1972 (NBC Photo)

Soap, which debuted in September 1977, was a highly controversial sitcom type spoof of the afternoon soap operas. The furor revolved around what many considered to be the show's excessive portrayal of illicit sexual liaisons. Two of the dozen or so cast members were ventriloquist Jay Johnson, who appeared as Chuck, with his pal, Bob Campbell. Though Bob was a dummy, he was accepted as a regular actor, which resulted in some ludicrous situations. For example, he once acted as a witness, to verify Chuck's testimony! The show ended in April, 1981. Johnson later appeared in two episodes, in 1990 and 1991, of the police drama, *Broken Badges* as a ventriloquist cop.

In an episode of the hit show, *L.A. Law*, Ronn Lucas portrayed an odd chap named Paterson, who could not communicate without his dummy. In addition, the dummy actually seeks legal help in order to sue someone who broke his arm. Lucas also appeared on *Who's In Charge Here?* as well as *The Ronn Lucas Show*, his own weekly prime time show, on the BBC for three years.

In an episode of *Northern Exposure* a quirky series in the second half of the 1990s, Chris (John Corbett) gets a ventriloquist's dummy and includes him in his "Chris in the Morning" radio program but the dummy becomes more popular, because he tells it like it is.

Night Court had a bit with two ventriloquists in parallel stories. In one, Ronn Lucas played a man who doesn't move his lips when he talks, and annoys everyone. In the other story, Ricky Lane is a ventriloquist who has a falling-out with his dummy. The dummy chokes him, quits the act, and then jumps off a window ledge.

Though that was weird, it is not quite as macabre as some of the movies mentioned in the previous chapter. This is probably a good time to point out that today movies have become such a part of television programming it is hard to believe that in the early days of television, movie moguls, who knew what **they** had done to vaudeville theaters, had refused to allow their movies to be shown on the new, competitive medium, fearing that the small screen would replace the big screen as moviegoers stopped going. They worried that if people stayed home to watch the tube, theaters would close. The studio brass later relented and never regretted it.[41]

Thus, early on, the old movies carried the "mad ventriloquist myth" from the big screen to the small screen, for a whole new generation. While that might have been more than enough to keep the myth alive, the small screen had its own unique ways of approaching the subject. Once again, ventriloquism served as a great source of plots for all manner of television fare. Some, as we have seen, were simply off the wall. But others ranged from sincere and funny to sinister and ghastly.

Among the finest of the genre, the *Twilight Zone* series featured two outstanding variations on the movies' malevolent dummy ploy. In *Caesar and Me*, Jackie Cooper portrays a down-on-his-luck ventriloquist living in a shabby boarding house. To survive, he turns to a life of petty crime, seemingly encouraged by his deceitful dummy, Caesar, with whom he argues. The landlady's nasty preteen niece taunts Cooper, and eavesdrops at his door, where she hears about the crime. She then tips off the police. After the ventriloquist has been arrested and taken away, sinister Caesar shows his true colors. He really is a devilish doll. When the kid looks in on the dummy, he conquers once again, by talking her into joining up with him as a "team." They deserve each other.

In *The Dummy*, Cliff Robertson appears as Jerry Etherson, an alcoholic ventriloquist who has a volatile relationship with his dummy, 'Willie.' Etherson thinks Willie is alive, evil, and out to destroy him. He also seems to hear the voice of his dummy calling him out of "thin air." (Etherson's name, though pronounced with the short "e" as "Eh-therson," might easily be derived from "ether," a word which means both an extremely volatile liquid as well as "the upper atmosphere, the air") Jerry's agent suggests psychiatric help. But Jerry doesn't turn to Freud. To escape from Willie, Jerry tries working more with his other, more passive doll, 'Goofy Goggles,' a Mortimer Snerd/Knucklehead Smiff type, who, he feels, is "safer" because he has no will of his own.

The act goes well, so Jerry decides to take the show on the road with Goofy Goggles and leave the evil Willie behind. Just to be on the safe side, he locks Willie in a trunk before he departs. All is not well, though. Jerry hears Willie's voice taunting him. The director tilts the camera and everything is askew. Desperate, Jerry returns to the darkened club, frantically unlocks the trunk, yanks Willie out and smashes the figure to pieces. He then hears Willie laughing maniacally and discovers, to his amazement and horror, that he has actually destroyed Goofy Goggles! Blackout. – Fade in; we see Jerry still working clubs with Willie — but this is a Rod Serling gem with a "Twilight" twist — Willie's the ventriloquist, Jerry's the dummy.

Way before "Chucky" came to the screen as a homicidal play pal, writer Charles Beaumont wrote the episode "Living Doll" for the *Twilight Zone* TV series. The gory story starts when a doll says things like "Momma," "Papa" and "I'm going to kill you!" It starred Telly Savalas, Tracy Stratford, Mary La Roche and was directed by Richard Sarifian. By the way, the doll was not kidding.

Perhaps one of the most inventive and bizarre variations was an episode by a master of suspense who was at home with both movies and the tube. It was *The Glass*

Eye on “Alfred Hitchcock Presents” starring Jessica Tandy and Tom Conway, where Tandy is Julia, a frustrated spinster, who falls in love with a handsome ventriloquist, one Max Collodi, an elusive star who performs with his dummy George. Julia, now a dedicated fan, tries, unsuccessfully, to meet Max. She follows him all over England, wherever he tours. At long last she arranges an interview, but she must abide by specific conditions. In a dimly lit dressing room she is told to remain seated in a certain chair, a short distance from the love of her life.

Julia agrees to follow these instructions. However, she can’t resist the impulse to touch her idol. She lunges forward to caress the ventriloquist and reels back in shock. Upon touching him, he keels over onto the floor, one eye falls out of its socket and the head rolls off his shoulders. The idol appears to have more than just feet of clay. The mystery is finally solved, with a twist, of course.. It turns out that Max Collodi, the presumed ventriloquist, is actually a life-sized dummy, and George, the supposed dummy, is actually a ‘midget’ ventriloquist!

By the way, does the name Collodi ring a bell? That was the pen name of the author of *Pinnochio*, the wooden boy who came to life.

Which naturally leads in to Jim Barber, a singer, artist, and producer of the intriguing *TalkingWood*, a high-tech multimedia CD ROM on ventriloquism featuring the Vent Haven Museum, and more. Barber is an award-winning vent, who has just such a “midget vent” act, he actually made himself. He has presented it all over the United States and on television. Unlike such portrayals on the media, this act has given ventriloquism a positive image. He plays the little “dummy” sitting on the arm of the big (real) dummy, named Seville, who is the “ventriloquist” who walks out, carrying him(self) on stage. A most clever illusion, without trick photography and you’ll call your optometrist when it’s over. “They” open the show with a routine appropriate for the occasion or organization, customized if necessary. Then, playing on the name of the act “Barber and Seville,” “they” (Jim) veer into, and through, a high-spirited, operatic, hilarious, burlesque “duet” version of Rossini’s “Barber of Seville”... with a third character joining in for the finale. It is a marvelous, memorable masquerade worthy of every accolade. You have to see it to believe it. Hmm... no... you won’t then either.

As part of an *Ed Sullivan Retrospective*, which is such a great way to bring back the great acts of the past, comedian Albert Brooks did a cod ventriloquist act, his Danny and Dave routine. Like Bergen and McCarthy of times past, the dummy pointed out that, while Brooks was speaking, his lips were moving, and asked what was wrong. The first-rate Mr. Brooks replied that he was nervous as this was a live, nation-wide TV show. The dummy suggested that Mr. Brooks have a cigarette, to calm his nerves. The ending is too good to give away.

The comic magazine *Tales From the Crypt* became a television show with the same name. In the second season, 1990-1991, one intense episode, “The Ventriloquist Dummy” derived from a story which was published in the comic magazine. It starred Don Rickles as “the world's greatest ventriloquist” and a

persistent Bob "Bobcat" Goldthwait as a fellow who idolized him. Rickles was an eerily superb, high-strung ventriloquist whose right hand is deformed. He keeps it hidden in a cloth when not performing, or behind the dummy when he is. It turns out that the hand is actually an unseparated twin who not only plays the part of the dummy, but who is a vicious killer and threatens his "brother." He requires medication to keep him "calm." There is a supernatural quality to this gory tale.

Then along comes the *Goosebumps* series, *Night of the Living Dummy II* (No 31) Slappy, is yet another demonic dummy, who comes to the home of Amy, an aspiring young ventriloquist. He proves to her that he can walk, talk, and make plenty of trouble without anyone's help. These books and shows with their devilish dummies start a whole new generation on the myths.

In 1979, Dai Kornberg hosted a show which was carried on Channel 13 in the New York City area on *The Art of Ventriloquism*. He invited George Schindler, Dan Ritchard and yours truly, to demonstrate the many facets of this fascinating field. It received many letters of appreciation from viewers and we had a great time.

Late Night with Conan O'Brien featured an unusual sight gag conceived by a writer for a 1993 Christmas show. They called it, "The Ventriloquist Dummy Choir." That first appearance was received so well, it has become a regular feature, and now we call it the "Ventrilochoir" for short. They call it on short notice, too, making it a "pickup" group of "ventriloquists" by availability more than ability -- so skill level is, unfortunately, part of their visual joke. However, we have a mini convention and get a kick out of it, as well as some modest pay, 82 seconds of fame, and a chance for family and friends to point at the TV and laugh! It's a campy group of nine or so professional and amateur ventriloquists and their dummies who dress in choir robes and sing one song for the occasion. Though the group has evolved over the years, depending upon each individual's availability, Jim Fromewick, a fine, versatile actor who is also an accomplished ventriloquist, often leads the group. Since that debut, it has been assembled for various holidays and celebrations from Mothers' Day, Thanksgiving, St. Patrick's Day, Cinqo de Mayo, and the beginning of summer, often as a fill-in at the last minute. In May 1997 Conan was asked to send this singular singing sensation to Budapest, Hungary for a prime-time television appearance. The event was run on "Late Night" for his American fans.

An episode (May 5, 1997) of the television series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Buffy is Sarah Michelle Gellar) presented a novel plot twist on the horror-movie cliché written by Dean Batali and Rob des Hotel. "The Puppet Show" is a gory story, for sure, with demons, blood and guts, and a book about how dolls can become alive, more or less, by killing others. Given that, a student named Morgan is a ventriloquist. Naturally, according to the cliché, he is a bit of an oddball. Of course, he has a dummy that is possessed – don't we all? His name is Sid. Note the "ID" in Sid. Though possessed, he is not evil, but is sort of one of the good guys.

After all, didn't it really start with a dummy on television? We owe a debt to John Logie Baird for using Stookie Bill for the first television transmission and recording.

Also, though he had nothing directly to do with this CD, mention has been made of Don McLean and his resourceful workmanship in retrieving the images of Stookie Bill and others, and he is included in the acknowledgments for bringing to light those first images ever recorded, hidden on wax disks, and not seen for over seventy years.

Through all the eras and errors of entertainment's evolution, from witches, itinerant street performers, stories in print, vaudeville, radio, movies, and talkies, to a time of television; live, filmed, taped; whether broadcast via antenna, satellite, cable, videotape, video disks, HDTV, or the Internet, the public's hunger for different entertainment seems to be insatiable.

Therefore, there appears to be little truth to Fred Allen's humorous epitaph on vaudeville. While there is less live entertainment in general, except for the big resorts, there was a resurgence in Comedy Clubs, a kind of vaudeville in miniature, and television shows with variety acts which featured ventriloquists. So vaudeville wasn't simply buried in a mere electronic box, a closed casket. TV became a glowing, magic window on a copious cascade of entertainment which flooded America and much of the world. It attracted larger audiences, provided channels for change, and offered opportunities for many creative performers. Among those were, are, and will be, ventriloquists, heirs of an ancient art — time travelers in ventriloquism's venerable voyage, from B.C. to TV... and beyond, having the last laugh at that epitaph.

The End? — Not really! The Story So Far...

EPILOGUE

The Rest of the Story

The previous chapters describing
unfolding trends in the field showed
the phases that the art has experienced:
Serious and sacred, secretive men and women,
no dolls, humorous polyphony, talking hand and glove,
nutcracker doll, people as dummies, masks and larger dolls,
line of dolls with little or no connection, giving way to the personality
of a single-figure presentation, then back to the line of figures, but transformed
into a cohesive sketch or playlet, then back to the single personality doll or small
troupe again with Bergen and Brough, and more recently another shift backwards
to the talking hand and glove,
and, yes, even no dolls.

Yet “Ventriloquism From B.C. to TV” was only part of the vast story.
It continues here with a broad look at its place in the rest of the world
as well as the odd bits and pieces that make it, and keep it, interesting.

Part One

The Charlie Awards

In show business there are many awards, the most famous of which are the Oscar, the Emmy, the Grammy and the Tony for recognition of excellence in motion pictures, television, music and the legitimate theater. They are presented as the result of polling those performers in their respective fields. It would therefore seem appropriate for one to be awarded as a symbol of merit in the field of ventriloquism. Why not a trophy named after Edgar Bergen's famous precocious partner? Why not a *Charlie*?

Most of us involved in the ventriloquial branch of the theatrical profession have been asked, at one time or another, whom we consider to be a master of our craft. Affected modesty precludes our saying, "You're speaking to him/her." Actually, it's a tough call! Over the years many talented and creative performers have contributed innovations and techniques, changed the scene and added new dimensions. Selecting the most worthy recipient is far from simple. Everyone could debate the fine points. In fact, each year a ventriloquist is recognized by their peers as "Ventriloquist of the Year." The criteria vary. However, how could anyone decide who is the top ventriloquist of all time? It is such a varied field that it is almost impossible to compare across eras, because styles and customs continually change. How can you compare one with another, especially with those of whom we have only written accounts. What person alive has seen every performer today, let alone all who ever existed? So, to avoid unending controversy, I questioned myself, ...which, needless to say, is the norm for a ventriloquist. Actually, I picked up my wooden partner, turned to the mirror and asked, "Who do you think is the world's greatest ventriloquist?" The answer was, "I take the fifth!" Unfortunately, it is not an easy decision to make and even *we* couldn't agree. It was impossible to settle on just one. However, considering the forerunners as well as the contemporary stars, the following selections are the strictly personal results of the "Stanley Burns-Stanley Burns" poll.

Monsieur Alexandre

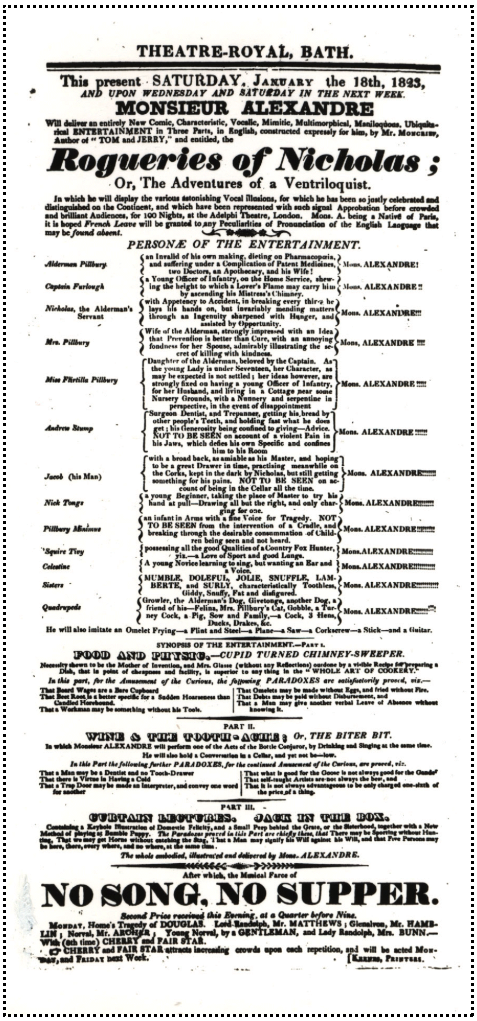
One of the most acclaimed and admired performers was the incomparable French ventriloquist known as “Monsieur Alexandre” (1797-1864), an international celebrity in the 1820s. His autograph album shows that he enthralled Napoleon Bonaparte and most European Royalty of that era. Born Nicholas Marie Vattemare, in Paris, little Nicholas discovered his ventriloquial talent in 1803, at the tender age of six. It really started as he played that perennially popular children’s game, “Hide and Seek.” This round was different.

Nicholas was hiding and risked calling out to his playmates, taunting them to find him. Several factors then came together for the first time. Innate talent for disguising the sound of his voice, the imprecision of human hearing, youthful enthusiasm and who knows what else, created a unique situation. His bewildered friends looked for him at a place where they believed the voice came from instead of going directly to *him*, “the source.” But Nicholas was no less bewildered. Suddenly he discovered that he could fool his playmates by “throwing” his voice, without being aware of its impact. Even though he was hiding, and there was no need to be concerned with lip movement, this set the stage for his future career. A small boy of six could not imagine the impact his discovery would have on his own life and on the lives of future audiences.

He attended school and continued to experiment with his skill, playing vocal pranks on anyone available. His erudite parents, who had more intellectual plans for their son’s future, tolerated his antics as they waited for him to outgrow this ‘phase.’ They exposed him to a world of books, which he loved, and several foreign languages. Later, encouraged to become a churchman, he tried it for two years, but his heart was not there. He was then encouraged to follow in the footsteps of his father, and study the legal profession, but it had no appeal for him either.

At that time France was at its zenith in military prowess, but military glory was not something young Vattemare sought. While Napoleon was away on triumphant campaigns in his continental quest for power, young Vattemare turned to the field of medicine, in his continual quest for a career. He was a bright student and eventually spent his internship at the St. Louis Hospital in Paris. After a few months he also lost interest in this, too. However, he was a dedicated student, and tended dutifully to his patients. Some of his fellow students disliked his good example, which made them look bad, and did not treat him kindly. He revived the pranks of his childhood with some new twists. He frightened his fellow students by making it appear that the cadavers in the morgue were crying out at night. Everyone thought that someone was declared dead in a terrible misdiagnosis, and searched the morgue. His macabre sense of humor would certainly not have been appreciated by his peers, so he never let on that he was the cause of the trouble.

Young, disenchanted Vattemare then tried out his ventriloquial talents on the hospitalized patients, the victims of diseases and wars. He might have remained unappreciated, unfulfilled and unhappy, were it not for one of those quirks of fate. During a typhus epidemic, all the other students fled the hospital. Nicholas alone tended the patients. As a reward for his dedication he was commissioned, in 1814, to take a platoon of three-hundred Prussian soldiers to Berlin. Practicing his ventriloquism to amuse the people in towns and on farms along the way, he likewise kept his charges entertained and in good spirits. He also entertained troops in the field and was ultimately awarded a Prussian war medal.



THEATRE-ROYAL, BATH.

This present SATURDAY, JANUARY the 18th, 1823,
AND UPON WEDNESDAY AND SATURDAY IN THE NEXT WEEK.

MONSIEUR ALEXANDRE

Will deliver an entirely New Comic, Characteristic, Vocalic, Mimicic, Multimorphical, Manilocuous, Ubiquitarial ENTERTAINMENT in Three Parts, in English, constructed expressly for him, by Mr. Moscrop, Author of "TOM and JERRY," and entitled, the

Rogueries of Nicholas;

Or, The Adventures of a Ventriloquist.

In which he will display the various astonishing Vocal Illusions, for which he has been so justly celebrated and distinguished on the Continent, and which have been represented with such signal Approbation before crowded and brilliant Audiences, for 100 Nights, at the Adelphi Theatre, London. Mons. A. being a Native of Paris, it is hoped *French Leave* will be granted to any Peculiarities of Pronounciation of the English Language that may be found absent.

PERSONÆ OF THE ENTERTAINMENT.

Alderman Pillbury — an Invalid of his own making, dieting on Pharmacopœia, and suffering under a Complication of Patent Medicines, two Doctors, an Apothecary, and his Wife! — Mons. ALEXANDRE!

Captain Furlough — a Young Officer of Infantry, on the Home Service, shewing the bright to which a Lover's Flame may carry him by ascending his Mistress's Chimney. — Mons. ALEXANDRE!

Nicholas, the Alderman's Servant — with Appetency to Accident, in breaking every thing he lays his hands on, but invariably mending matters through an Ingenuity sharpened with Hunger, and assisted by Opportunity. — Mons. ALEXANDRE!!

Mrs. Pillbury — Wife of the Alderman, strongly impressed with an Idea that Prevention is better than Cure, with an annoying fondness for her Spouse, admirably illustrating the secret of killing with kindness. — Mons. ALEXANDRE !!

Miss Flirtilla Pillbury — Daughter of the Alderman, beloved by the Captain. As the young Lady is under Seventeen, her Character, as may be expected is not settled; her ideas however, are strongly fixed on having a young Officer of Infantry, for her Husband, and living in a Cottage near some Nursery Grounds, with a Nursery and serpentine in perspective, in the event of disappointment — Mons. ALEXANDRE !!!

Andrew Stump — Surgeon Dentist, and Trepanner, getting his bread by other people's Teeth, and holding fast what he does not; his Generosity being confined to giving—Advice, NOT TO BE SEEN on account of a violent Pain in his Jaws, which defies his own Specific and confines him to his Room — Mons. ALEXANDRE !!!!

Jacob (his Man) — with a broad back, as amiable as his Master, and hoping to be a great Drawer in time, practising meanwhile on the Corks, kept in the dark by Nicholas, but still getting something for his pains. NOT TO BE SEEN on account of being in the Cellar all the time. — Mons. ALEXANDRE!!!!!

Nick Tongs — a young Beginner, taking the place of Master to try his hand at pull—Drawing all but the right, and only charging for one. — Mons. ALEXANDRE!!!!!!

Pillbury Maclane — an infant in Arms with a fine Voice for Tragedy. NOT TO BE SEEN from the intervention of a Cradle, and breaking through the desirable consummation of Childrest being seen and not heard. — Mons. ALEXANDRE!!!!!!!

'Squire Tiey — possessing all the good Qualities of a Country Fox Hunter, viz.—a Love of Sport and good Lungs. — Mons. ALEXANDRE!!!!!!!!

Celestine — A young Novice learning to sing, but wanting an Ear and a Voice. — Mons. ALEXANDRE!!!!!!!!!

Sisters — MUMBLE, DOLEFUL, JOLIE, SNUFFLE, LAMBERTE, and SURLY, characteristically Toothless, Giddy, Snuffy, Fat and disfigured. — Mons. ALEXANDRE!!!!!!!!!!

Quadrupeds — Growler, the Alderman's Dog, Givetongue, another Dog, a friend of his—Feline, Mrs. Pillbury's Cat, Gobble, a Turkey Cock, a Pig, Sow and Family,—a Cock, 3 Hens, Ducks, Drakes, &c. — Mons. ALEXANDRE!!!!!!!!!!

He will also imitate an Omelet Frying—a Flint and Steel—a Plane—a Saw—a Corkscrew—a Stick—and a Guitar.

SYNOPSIS OF THE ENTERTAINMENT.—PART I.

FOOD AND PHYSICS.—*CUPID TURNED CHIMNEY-SWEEPER.*

Necessity known to be the Mother of Invention, and Mrs. Glass (without any Reflection) confess by a certain Recipe for preparing a Dish, that in point of cheapness and facility, is superior to any thing in the "WHOLE ART OF COOKERY."

In this part, for the Amusement of the Curious, the opposing PARADOXES are satisfactorily proved, viz.—

That Bread Wages are a Sure Outpost — That Cinders may be made without Eggs, and fried without Fire.
That Bear Meat is a better specific for a Sudden Hoarseness than Distilled Hardwood. — That Debts may be paid without Disbursement, and
That a Workman may be something without his Tools. — That a Man may give another verbal Leave of Absence without knowing it.

PART II.

WINE & THE TOOTH-ACHE; *Or, THE BITER BIT.*

In which Monsieur ALEXANDRE will perform one of the Acts of the Boots Conjurer, by Drinking and Singing at the same time.
He will also hold a Conversation in a Cellar, and yet not be—low.

In this Part the following further PARADOXES, for the continued Amusement of the Curious, are proved, viz.—

That a Man may be a Dentist and no Tooth-Drawer. — That what is good for the Goose is not always good for the Gander.
That there is Virtue in Hearing a Cork. — That salt-cellars are not always the first used.
That a True Dane may be made an Interpreter, and convey one word for another. — That he is not above encouragement to be only charged one-sixth of the price of a thing.

PART III.

CURTAIN LECTURES. — JACK IN THE BOX.

Containing a Keyhole Illustration of Domestic Felicity, and a Small Peep behind the Green, or the Sisterhood, together with a New Method of Starving a Rumble Purpe. *The Paradoxes proved in this Part are chiefly these, that* There may be Sporting without Hunting, That we may get Horns without sounding the Song, That a Man may signify his Will against his Will, and that Few Persons may be here, there, every where, and no where, at the same time.

The whole embodied, illustrated and delivered by Mons. ALEXANDRE.

After which, the Musical Farce of

NO SONG, NO SUPPER.

Second Price received this Evening, at a Quarter before Nine.

MONDAY, Home's Tragedy of DOUGLAS. Lord Randolph, Mr. MATTHEWS; Glenalvon, Mr. HAMBLIN; Norval, Mr. ANDERSON; Young Norval, by a GENTLEMAN, and Lady Randolph, Mrs. BUNN.—With (4th time) CHERRY and FAIR STAR.

☞ CHERRY and FAIR STAR attracts increasing crowds upon each repetition, and will be acted Monday, and FRIDAY next Week. [KEENE, PRINTER.

Nicholas Marie Vattemare officially became "Monsieur Alexandre," ventriloquist extraordinaire! Alexandre's playbills read like a menu listing countless skills and abilities which would dazzle and delight any audience. His act, of course, did not resemble those of later ventriloquists. Alexandre performed in the days before the wise cracking wooden dummy identified the performer's specialty. In Alexandre's time the art was exclusively polyphony. He had an astonishing talent for creating convincing vocal illusions. Among them were those of: animals, birds, insects, breaking an egg, frying an omelet, sawing wood, and a guitar being strummed, all of which could be heard throughout the theater. A poem quoted later also describes Alexandre as sounding like he is, "A workshop in your person, saw, chisel and screw." The saw is fairly obvious, the chisel would have made a sound like splintering wood, the screw was a carpenter's clamp, probably made of wood that squeaked as it was tightened.

With his unique capabilities in mind, including a facility with languages and accents, he used cleverly written skits and short plays with several characters in plotted storylines. One of these was published in London by J. Lowndes, in 1822. with the long title:

> *Adventures of a ventriloquist: or, The rogueries of Nicholas*, an entirely new comic, characteristic, vocalic, mimitic, multiformical, maniloquous, ubiquitarical entertainment, in three parts, as embodied, illustrated, and delivered by Monsieur Alexandre... at the Adelphi Theatre, Strand, 1822 written and contrived by W.[illiam T.[homas] Moncrieff; [illustrated by I. R. Cruikshank].

Cruikshank was a noted author, illustrator and puppet authority. In 1822 at London's Adelphia Theatre "Monsieur Alexandre," now twenty-five years old, presented *The Adventures Of A Ventriloquist* subtitled *The Rogueries Of Nicholas*.[42]

Vattemare followed through with props and costumes. Rehearsals of his full theatrical productions, some of which had up to forty different characters, were always attended by the whole cast. Alexandre knew every part. He had to. He, alone, played them all!

In an interview in "Strange Careers of an Artist" published in 1868 in *Hours at Home*, he relates that Miss Wylton, an Englishwoman who had been in the employ of the Vattemare family for twenty-five years, assisted him in his changes of costume. Remember, these were a century before the ubiquitous Velcro brand hook and loop fastener was invented.(p. 538)

> She assisted me with extraordinary skill. She alone was behind the scenes and was at every change of costume at hand to facilitate my metamorphosis, which had to be accomplished at lightning speed. In many instances I wore several costumes, one above the other, so that I was able to peel like an onion; and finally my real art, that of imitating other voices, assisted me most powerfully. As I was able to imitate all voices, all sorts of noises with utmost accuracy, it was very easy for me to constantly engross the attention of the audience. If I myself was not on the stage, the voice was there, and I could soliloquize on the stage, or begin a conversation, interrupted by the cries of animals while I changed my costume behind the scenes.

While it is true that people lived at a much slower pace then, than we do now, which actually gave him relatively "more" time to change than would probably be acceptable in our channel-surfing society, we are going strictly by the judgement of his contemporaries and peers. In fact, Alexandre was not only respected by his contemporaries but by his 'competition,' as well. Fred Maccabe, an English ventriloquist who was not always so generous with praise and even called himself "The Great Maccabe," humbly said of his colleague, "I am bound to believe he is the greatest ventriloquist ever known."

Alexandre was one of the first to drink a glass of water while performing ventriloquism. Though later copied or re-invented by others, this feat was touted in a playbill of the Theatre Royal in Bath, England, dated January 18, 1823.

Because he is credited with introducing "...changes of character in full view of the audience." Though such swift changes were not always strictly in 'full view,' he was the first performer to create a completely new genre for the theater; the "quick-change artist." More than that, he added his unique specialty, ventriloquism, with clever characterizations in both voice and manner.[43] Alexandre was an innovator, and for all these reasons I award him the *Charlie*.

America was finally privileged to see Alexandre's flawless tour-de-force on October 29, 1839, when he made his debut to a capacity crowd in New York. The next day, the New York *Morning Herald* reported that, "His singular and extraordinary performance cannot be described —it must be seen. The applause was loud and long." On November 2, "This gentleman is the most extraordinary man of his age.[era] He never was equalled as a ventriloquist, and his wonderful power of mimicry, imitation, and rapid changes, render his performance unrivalled."

With all the ovations and acclaim still ringing in his ears, Alexandre made one final change of character. "Monsieur Alexandre" ventriloquist extraordinaire, the man who was always looking for himself, removed makeup and costumes, dropped out of the cast of his shows, and changed back into Nicholas Vattemare. He had finally found himself.

Though he could easily be booked anywhere, he now directed his energies toward travel and to being an international patron of the arts. He rededicated himself to one of his early and lasting interests, books. In his travels Alexandre had noticed that libraries and museums had odd practices. Duplicates of books, considered to be mere rubbish in one library, were regarded as indispensable in another. Vattemare, an innovator once again, conceived and implemented a system of exchanging this surplus of cultural wealth between countries, which became known worldwide as "Vattemare's System Of International Exchanges." Unfortunately this idealistic project met with some staunch opposition and even some derision. One petty carping critic wrote, "His system of international exchange is thought to be a substitute for his worn out voice of ventriloquism." Vattemare was above absurd accusations, however. He persisted in his campaign and, shortly after arriving in America, presented his project to the United States Government. The plan elated elected leaders, including President Martin Van Buren. In February of 1840, Congress passed a resolution giving the librarian of the Library of Congress the authority to exchange any duplicates which might be in the collection.

Plaque honoring
the founders of
The Boston Public Library

He also helped to establish a free public library in Boston, Massachusetts. In tribute to this great man, and to thank him for his admirable idea and praiseworthy work, his name appears prominently on a large brass plaque

which is embedded in the floor at the entrance of what is now called the Boston Public Library.[main building] He continued to promote his idea and fostered the exchange of books between America and France, until shortly before his death, in 1864.

The Boston Public Library
(postcard ca.1920s)

Monsieur Alexandre, international citizen, was respected by the thousands who flocked to see him perform, including the mighty, the masses and the celebrities of his day.

His skill, as the originator of quick-change artistry for his one man shows, prompted Sir Walter Scott, noted author and poet, to memorialize him in a poem, which is on the following page. It was eventually published in the *Bulletin of the Boston Public Library* in 1927 and is a perfect way to summarize the extraordinary talent of a man I would love to go back in time to see.

Alexandre's promotional material, ca.1800 shows what the audience believes to be a cast of many, but is in reality a one-man show.

To Monsieur Alexandre
"The Arch Deceiver"
by
Sir Walter Scott

Of yore, in old England, it was not thought good
To carry two visages under one hood.
What should folks say to you
Who have faces such plenty
That from under one hood
You last night showed us twenty.
Stand forth, Arch Deceiver! And tell us the truth
Are you handsome or ugly, in age or in youth?
Man, woman or child, or a dog or a mouse?
Or are you at once, each live thing in the house?
Each live thing, did I ask? Each dead implement too!
A workshop in your person, saw, chisel and screw.
Above all, are you one individual? I know
You must be at least, Alexandre and Co.
But I think you're a troop ...an assembly ...a Mob
And, that I as the Sheriff, must take up the job
And, instead of rehearsing your wonders in verse
Must read you the Riot Act and bid you, disperse!

This, of course, was a compliment, implying that he performed so many characters that he was a crowd who disturbed the peace by creating "riotous" laughter. The **Riot Act** was an English law, enacted in 1715, providing that if twelve or more people unlawfully assemble and disturb the public peace, they must disperse upon proclamation or be considered guilty of felony.

Señor Wences

Señor Wences is certainly an obvious, and deserving, candidate for a *Charlie* award. The Spanish "laureate of the larynx" has been actively involved in his craft for well over seventy years, longer than anyone else, I believe. At this writing, he is over one-hundred years old.

Señor Wences first came to the United States around 1930 for a brief appearance at El Chico, a Spanish theme nightclub in Greenwich Village. Since he only spoke Spanish at the time, his initial attempt at English was about as funny as his act. He subsequently devised a phonetic English transliteration of his routine, writing it on the cuffs of his shirt and on slips of paper concealed in and on his props. By reading these crib sheets he conquered the language barrier to some degree. He was well received, but his major acclaim resulted from his hilarious visits right into the nations' living-rooms, via television many years later. The most notable exposure in this medium was on the *Ed Sullivan Show*, where he performed twenty-three times in twenty years, and years later in re-broadcast segments on some special retrospectives.

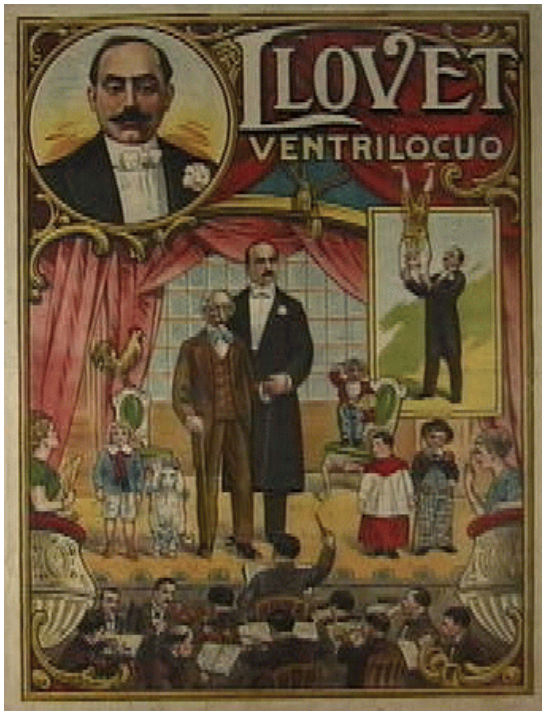
Ed Sullivan watches from the wings as the master entertains millions of fans once again.

He is so well known, that people often recognize him. One evening my wife Sylvia and I were having dinner in a Broadway restaurant with the Don of the dummies and his charming wife, Talie (Natalie). At the next table a woman kept staring at him. To break the tension, Wences smiled and waved. I thought I heard her remark to her husband, "How about that? I've seen him so often on the *Ed Sullivan Show*, he thinks he knows me."

When he was absent from the American television scene, for a period of seven years, many people assumed that he had retired. Hardly! He was happily, and busily, performing at one of the chic nightclubs in Paris, the Crazy Horse Saloon.

Señor Wences was born Wenceslao Moreno Cetena, as the lyrics of an old 1930s song had it "in a little Spanish town" the hamlet of Penaranda. The town may have been small, but his family was large; he was the fifth of seventeen children. His was a talented family. His father, an artist and theater musician used to transform his hand into a puppet to amuse his brood. The same device was later used by Wences himself to entertain his audiences. His brother, Moreno, also became a ventriloquist and used a parrot in his act. A nephew Luis Moreno, became a doctor as well as a ventriloquist and had his own television program in Spain.

While growing up, Wences was fascinated by the great Spanish ventriloquists he saw. Among these were “Llovett,” Eugenio Balder and Señor Sanchez Francisco. As a child, Wenceslao discovered his ability to do some basic ventriloquy. In school he played practical jokes on his classmates and teachers using his method of speaking without getting caught. Well, *usually* without getting caught. One, of several typical pranks which got him into trouble, still brings a smile to his face. When the teacher used to call the roll, he would answer, “¡Presente!” and “¡Aqui!” in the voices of the absentees. It usually worked, but not always.



Once, as punishment for a stunt, he had to stay after school and fill all the inkwells, a tedious task in the days before ballpoint pens. Since the job was messy, it served as a deterrent to troublemakers. As he poured the ink, the inevitable happened. It dripped onto his hand, coating the inside of his thumb and forefinger. Having made dolls with his hand in the past, he recognized the ink as ‘lips’. Detention was the mother of invention.

These escapades were purely for amusement; doing this professionally never entered his mind. He had other plans. When Wenceslao was growing up, there were only three ways for a young man to make money: become a bullfighter, a priest or a politician. Young Wences, like other boys in Spain, dreamed of becoming a famous bullfighter with the same fiery passion that many boys in America imagine they will someday be baseball, football, or basketball superstars. He was impressed with the danger, the style, the attitude, and the theatrics of the bullring. When the family later moved to Salamanca, a bullfighting center, the future matador was ecstatic. At the tender age of twelve he trained as a matador. He was a good student and, for seven years fought many bulls, until they got bigger and meaner. He lost out to only four, but even the scars he acquired from them did not end his career. When a bull gored his left arm, resulting in partial paralysis, the doctor advised him to look into another line of work. Wences said, “Bullfighting is two things; an art and, as Hemingway wrote, ‘death in the afternoon’.” The doctor suggested exercises to rehabilitate his arm. Wences chose juggling as the preferred form of therapy, while thinking about a new vocation. To relieve the tedium of mere practice, he joined a circus in order to travel and work out the kinks in his arm. While touring through Spain and Portugal, he learned many tricks and developed the sensitive timing required for balancing a spinning plate on a pool cue. He later added ventriloquism, his trademark white tie and tails, and developed an act so unique, that it is only identified with him.

Señor Wences has gained and maintained fame by more than simply turning his hand into a puppet. In his hands this ancient trick became a work of art. He opens his stage performance with Johnny. Well, almost. First he smiles to acknowledge the applause with which the audience greets him. He then extends his left hand, folding it into a fist. Instead of the messy ink of his youth, he uses lipstick to paint the inside of his thumb and extended finger to create the illusion of a mouth. He slips two "button eyes" into the folds of his fingers and places a blond wig on his knuckles. His partner takes shape! The soles of two tiny shoes are visible at the bottom of a tiny suit. With a loop in the neck, the suit is hooked onto the little finger of his left hand. The body is connected to the head and presto, "Heeeres Johnny!"

Wences starts a conversation with this little person. "Are you all right, Johnny?" Johnny replies in 'his' squeaky voice with a Spanish accent. Wences moves his thumb, Johnny's improvised mouth. His own lips don't move.

"S'all right!"

"You sing for us?" requests the big man.

"Okay," answers little Johnny as he lapses into a musical melange of Spanish double-talk. As Johnny continues to sing in his distinctive but undistinguished falsetto voice, Wences lights and smokes a cigarette. Johnny ends his silly solo on a high note, and again there is applause.

Johnny is now placed on a shelf beneath the cloth draped table. While he is not seen, he will be heard. Wences begins spinning a plate and balancing it on a long stick. It swings and sways precariously, or so it seems. He lurches toward the back of the table, trying to keep the plate from falling.

"Careful! Not so close," calls out a fearful Johnny.

"Are you afraid?" asks a solicitous Wences, looking down.

"N...n...not afraid," replies Johnny, bravely, and as they repeat it, Wences gets more emphatic.

"Is easy!" reassures Wences.

"'s easy for you... deefeecult for me," insists Johnny, a reply which has become a familiar, oft-used expression.

This chitchat is a crowd pleaser no matter how many times it is seen or heard. The "hand" has been, and will continue to be, performed by countless ventriloquists, and others looking for a quick puppet. What Wences has accomplished is to give it an identity, making it appear to be individually his, and his fans love it. They love everything he does. Wences now introduces Pedro, the dismembered member of the troupe— the head in the box with the handle-bar mustache, beard and glasses.

Alas, poor Yorick? Getting ahead without the box.

Pedro actually started out as a regular figure. He was a casualty of a train wreck, in which the body was destroyed. Instead of eliminating him from the act, or procuring another body, Wences stuck the head in a small box which had a door.

The box rests flat on the table, the door is open and Pedro watches as Wences balances the plate on the stick. As he brings it directly over Pedro, the man in the box becomes concerned. A star was born when the world heard the weird head in the box utter his famous catchphrase; “Close de door!” Later Wences checks to see if Pedro feels better. “’S’ all right?” he asks. “’S’ all right!” is the predictable reply. The exchange is now firmly entrenched in the annals of ventriloquial history, and the minds of devoted fans, as the exclusive property of Señor Wences.

Another of his comedic cohorts is Cecilia the chicken, who, Wences claims, keeps getting funnier with the years. He shows her an egg and asks, “What is this?”

She replies, “My son.”

“How do you know? Are you sure?” he queries.

Cecilia snaps, “I know my business!”

When the dialogue is analyzed one finds something interesting. Wences doesn’t actually resort to jokes. There is an indefinable rhythmic ping-pong of pieces of words, or short phrases, which make up snippets of conversations. The sounds have a harmony that enhances the relationship he has with his characters. There is no hostility, as is common with some other ventriloquial acts. The act is full of “thank you’s, very nice, okay? ‘s all right? ‘s all right! and even, “Give me a kiss.”

He gave a command performance for Queen Elizabeth's parents, King George and Queen Mary, in 1937. He also performed for King Farouk and Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S Truman, [who had no middle name, so he added an “S” without a period because it is not an abbreviation for anything] Dwight David Eisenhower and Richard Milhous Nixon.

Señor Wences and his performances have long been considered to be the personification of “class” by audiences and fellow performers. His humor is timeless and, fortunately for posterity, he and his act have been recorded countless times. Besides the *Ed Sullivan Show* files, he was also chosen for the retrospective *Sullivan Specials* on CBS.

He has said, “Almost anyone can learn to make one voice without moving his lips, but a career is different. Many voices; that is a gift. I have seven voices, but I only do five of them: Johnny, Pedro, Cecilia the chicken, the man on the telephone, and myself, Señor Wences.” He defers to experience.

His reason for limiting his output to five is based on the trial and error of showmanship. “If a thing looks too difficult, the people just don’t believe it is possible... that I am not really doing it. I have tried it many times and always I find the same thing, in London, in Spain, in Paris, in South America. If I put in two more voices the audience thinks it is some trick I play on them, maybe phonograph records.

They do not believe I speak. So for a long time now, I do not use seven voices. Five gets big applause, but seven, not so big."

He is modest. Five gets *very* big applause. Even after entertaining so eminently for more years than many performers today have even lived, he still maintains his great sense of style, as well as his wonderful, world-renowned sense of humor. A distinguished, endearing and enduring performer, his expressive faces, humorous phrases, comedic characters, smooth rhythm and timing, tickle domestic and foreign funny bones.

"¿Is good?"
"¡Is very good!"
"¿Is nice?"
"¡Is very nice!"
"¿Okay?"
"¡Okay!"
"¿'S all right?
"¡'S all right!"

¡We all agree unanimously!

With Ono (Oh No!) The Clown

John Walcott Cooper

John Walcott Cooper's career spans the "Roots of American Ventriloquism," through "The Golden Age," and those chapters deal with that part of his life. While he would merit a *Charlie* for longevity alone, that is not why he is here. He suffered from discrimination which kept him out of top spots for many years, but that is not why he is here. He could have been a bitter man because of it, but he was not. He helped younger ventriloquists by coaching them, recommending books on the subject, and giving them sage counsel and encouragement, but that is not why he is here either. He deserves a *Charlie* award for being kind and generous to fledgling artists, as well as being a topnotch performer. He entertained under the most difficult of circumstances and always portrayed the art of ventriloquism in only the best light. His charisma and comedy expertise helped him overcome the prejudices that prevailed during the years he performed, and for all the above reasons, he most assuredly deserves a *Charlie*.

John Cooper and "Sam"

While he enjoyed his days on the big shows, and earned the respect of peers, after several years of prominence, Cooper became aware that the Golden Age of vaudeville was winding down. Live theatrical entertainment of a particular style experienced difficult times. Well-known vaudevillians, who were younger than Cooper, such as Edgar Bergen, Milton Berle, and George Burns and Gracie Allen, and one-time ventriloquist Fred Allen, made the transition to radio where new material was constantly in demand and the pace was more hectic. At this time in his life, John Cooper looked forward to a slower regime. Slower, but not static.

Fortunately, Cooper was asked to join a unit of the Major Bowes Original Amateur Hour, a renowned program on the radio airwaves. The group was one of several troupes of supposed 'amateur' contest winners who traveled around the country playing the remaining "vaudeville" houses. Cooper, whose name was quite familiar to audiences, followed a common practice in the business which believed it is best, when not playing as a "star," to change one's identity. It worked in those quieter times, when the performers traveled from town to town, before movies and television would put a performer's face everywhere and make it almost impossible to hide one's identity. He chose the name "Hezikiah Jones."

This tour gave him the performing life he loved and the slower pace he needed. He no longer had to pack six dummies, a barber chair, a backdrop, tables, etc., transport it all, and then set up the entire show on a tour. A simplified act using only one knee figure, "Sam," the bootblack he put in the towel box, in the barbershop skit,

would do. “Sam” claimed to be related to Charlie McCarthy, since he too had been carved at the Theodore Mack shop. Also, unlike radio shows, Cooper could use the same routines over and over, though he wrote or adapted new material because he wanted to. One of his more popular routines, which still makes those of us who remember it chuckle, had a bit which went like this:

Sam: (calling to “worker” in the cellar)
“What are you doing?”
Voice in the cellar: “I’m shoveling coal!”
Sam: “I can’t hear nothin’!”
Voice in the cellar: “It’s soft coal!”

So-called soft coal was in common use because it is a mineral coal with a high percentage of volatile matter that burns with a smoky yellow flame. It is also technically known as bituminous coal. Use of it resulted in soot and ash spewing from chimneys and settling on clothes drying on clotheslines that were stretched outside most homes and apartment windows or on their flat roofs of the era. This was long before washing machines and especially clothes dryers were the common appliances they are today.

While this is only a brief sample, it highlights Cooper’s versatility, style, and use of clever wit. The voice in the cellar was, of course, Cooper’s skillful distant voice. Though clever for its time, this joke was one which modern audiences, who are more familiar with gas, oil, or electric heat, would likely miss, as children today surely do when they sing about Frosty the Snowman’s eyes. One part they might miss is that “soft” coal was really like rock, so that shoveling it made quite a racket, which led to the second punch of the punch line — that the guy in the cellar was goofing off!

This was something the average person could relate to. Aside from his technical ability, part of Cooper’s appeal was that his material reflected the lives of his audience, but with that unmistakable Cooper twist of comedy. He paid close attention to details. Though he had to drop his formal education at an early age, he educated himself in the school of hard knocks where nothing escaped his curiosity. He read everything he could find and talked to all kinds of people, including doctors, lawyers, scientists, barbers, laborers, drunks, and anyone else he met in his travels, to get ideas. He then spent his “spare” time writing and rehearsing material geared to the public he knew so well.

For many years he had pleased that public on all the major minstrel and then vaudeville circuits in the country, and on the Bowes tours, but all that traveling was quite strenuous. He decided to “settle down.” For Cooper, that meant he would travel less, but still continue to entertain in nightclubs and at private functions. Fortunately for both Cooper and his audiences, instead of retiring, he had found a “second” career doing what he loved, for audiences who loved what he did. His refined style made him a favorite among New York’s elite.

Cooper appeared at such posh nightclubs of the period as the legendary Kit Kat Club off Park Ave, the elegant and exclusive El Morocco, and at the sophisticated Hotel Lexington. He was often invited to entertain at prestigious parties at these exclusive clubs, in addition to performing at functions catered in private homes. The jokes and topical references uttered by his dummy, Sam, were enjoyed and repeated by audiences everywhere. The distinguished Dr. Sidney Ross and his wife, Zara,

invited Cooper to a party at their luxurious Riverside Drive apartment in New York City. There, they kept a beautiful pet parrot, which was untrained. Though the parrot had never uttered a word, guests usually badgered the bird to repeat timeworn phrases such as, “Pretty Polly” and “Polly wanna cracker?” as though these phrases were instinctive to parrots.

Cooper, who had not yet performed for the gathering at Dr. Ross’s home, happened to be standing near the parrot. A practitioner of practical jokes and practiced parrot impersonator from his vaudeville act, he decided to have a little fun by giving the inept bird some instant aptitude. Suddenly, in a perfect parrot voice, the bird seemed to sing, *Sweet Georgia Brown*. The flabbergasted guests laughed and applauded the unparalleled parrot. One impressed woman chided her hostess: “What a surprise! And you said he didn’t talk!” As he patiently awaited the moment of truth, it was Cooper who was surprised. Mrs. Ross, well aware of Cooper’s telling talents, didn’t tell. Joining in the joke, she wryly replied, “I certainly am surprised, I didn’t know he knew that song.”

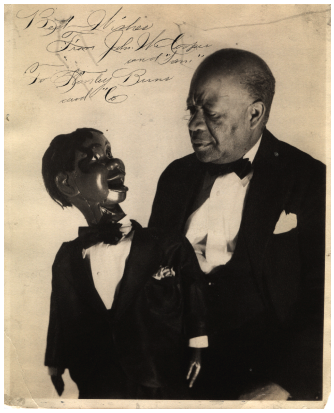
Bingham wrote, *Bingham’s book of ventriloquism, magic, and songs : an efficient and simple method of learning the art, based upon the experience of a professional exhibitor : the simplest method ever published : amusing dialogues for beginners.* Bingham, James W., New York, NY: Popular Pub. Co.,1880

Cooper not only helped budding vents, including Shari Lewis, with advice and suggestions, he enjoyed the friendship of numerous luminaries — Reynard, Duncan, Trovollo, James W. Bingham, who also wrote a book on ventriloquism [see box], Marshall Montgomery, C. W. Williams, The Great Howard, J. W. Winton, and Edger Bergen to name some. But it was his longtime friend, The Great Lester, with his dry sense of humor and ready wit, who pulled a ventriloquial stunt on his good “ole” friend, John. By this time, both Lester and Cooper were considered the grand old masters of the profession. They often teased each other as to who was the oldest ventriloquist in the world! I recall one evening when the three of us were in Lester’s Manhattan apartment. The phone rang, and Lester answered it. The voice on the phone clearly said, “This is the old age home. We’re looking for senile patients.” With his typical deadpan expression, Lester looked at Cooper and, handing him the phone, said, “John, it’s for you.”

Front of Bingham card

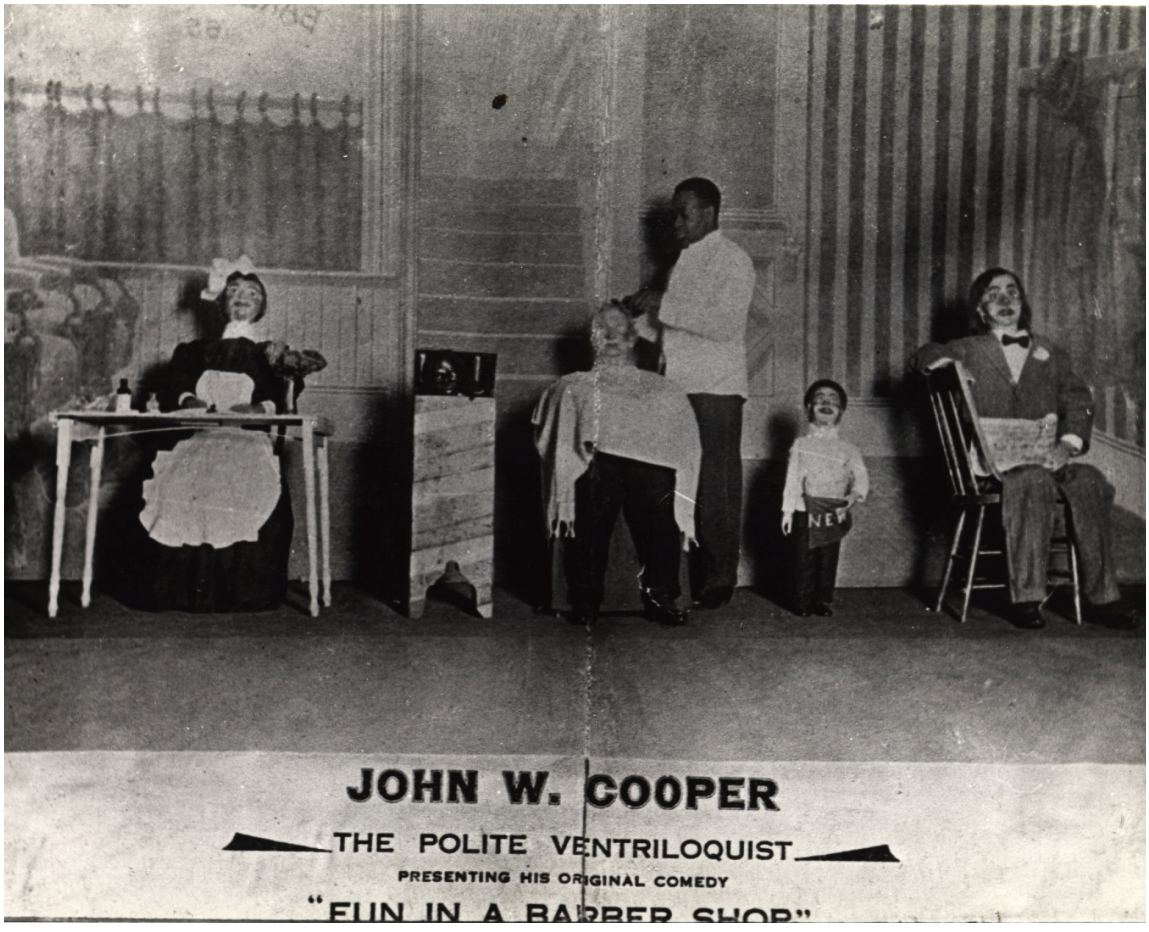
Back of Bingham card

Amiable, resourceful, John Walcott Cooper led a long and active life performing for many years, right to the end. This kind, gentle man died in 1966, at the age of ninety-three, outliving by ten years, his younger “old” pal, The Great Lester.



Sam joking with John Cooper

"Sam," Cooper's beloved pal, "outlived" them both. His full name is Sam Johnson, but he was never formal. A few "Sams" took part in Cooper's long career. Since January 19, 1989, Sam, jester that he is, has been holding court in the Brooklyn Historical Society, Brooklyn, NY. The informal snapshot (right) shows that he is back in the public eye through the courtesy of John Cooper's daughter, Joan Maynard, (left). Also in the photo are the author, middle and Anthony Cooper, no relation, but a fine young ventriloquist in his own right, standing under Sam's watchful eye. Photo by Chilly Willie [Reid}



The Great Lester

'He who steals my purse steals trash, but he who steals my good name steals gold.'[44]

Young Lester and Frank Byron take a stroll
Courtesy David Erskine

How true. "What's in a name?" Though hardly known by today's young performers, that name was a valuable property in his day. The Great Lester (1878-1956), was one of the most successful and most imitated artists in the history of ventriloquism. The acts of many performers were, and still are, in large measure, based on his. He merits a *Charlie* award more than any other ventriloquist on record, not simply for being clever and inventive, or because he was truly great, (which is actually an understatement) but because he changed the course of ventriloquial history in many significant ways. We all owe him a tremendous debt and he deserves to receive full recognition and credit which are long overdue. For starters, without him, there probably would not have been a *Charlie* to award in the first place, but I am getting ahead of myself.

As a talented and precocious child he could play the piano at a very early age. He later mastered other instruments and could have had a lucrative career in music. However, by the age of fourteen, he was performing magic in small theaters, dime museums and beer gardens in Chicago. He first called himself "Harry Lester," then went on to "Harry Eugene Lester" and finally, his business cards read: "The Great Lester None Greater"

Living up to that self-proclaimed reputation required dedication and hard work, which were characteristics he displayed. Little could he guess however, that he would work almost as hard protecting it from others, not challengers, since none were ever his equal, but impudent impostors. Though vaudeville was waning, the reputation of the Great Lester remained undiminished in the minds of the public. In 1933 he brought suit against someone using the name "The Great Lester." Delays were caused by traveling and other reasons not fully known. However, he put his imposter on notice publicly in an open letter, dated April 22, 1938, to the editor of *Tops Magazine*, a trade publication primarily for magicians. Lester wrote, "I would like to let my friends know that my name is being stolen."

So, "What's in a name?" The question of name assumed such proportions that in 1943 Lester instituted suit against another performer in Baltimore claiming infringement of his right to use the title "The Great Lester." Since the two Great Lesters crisscrossed the country, our hero could never quite catch up to the "imposter." However, as fate would have it, they were both scheduled to appear at

two venues in Baltimore. While that might confuse the public, here was an opportunity to "catch" the other guy in the act, so to speak. However, there was some sort of mix-up. When our hero, Harry, arrived at the nightclub where he was to perform, he was greeted by a photo of the other "Lester," Noel, instead of his own! This was the last straw. He was determined to sue! Testimony at the trial turned up five additional "Great Lesters" who had performed at one time or another. Most were never confronted, let alone apprehended. The defendant at hand, however, Noel Lester, was able to prove that "Lester" was his legal name, and he was entitled to use the title, whereas Szajkowski was the family name of the plaintiff Harry Lester. Our hero lost. Case closed.

Formal education had been of no interest to young Harry. At sixteen, show business continued to beckon. Under an assumed name he became a roustabout, driving stakes and erecting tent-poles for the Hummell & Hamilton circus. By learning from all the performers with whom he worked and traveled, along with his natural aptitude for entertaining, he was eventually promoted to the happier position of clown.

An eager student, he became adept at magic, mind reading, bare back riding, rope twirling, sword swallowing, and hot-air balloon riding and jumping. He also became an expert pool hustler. He remained with the circus until he fell from a balloon basket and received an injury that caused him to walk slightly stoop-shouldered for the rest of his life. After leaving the circus he played the small time, as "Kaloofra the Arabian Magician," and occasionally hustled a game of pool. He had not yet found his niche.

It is hard to believe, but in all this time, he had not come in contact with a ventriloquist until, at the age of twenty, he saw Orrin Knight perform. This clever entertainer amused and amazed his audiences with distant voice illusions and imitations. Just by seeing this show, Lester was hooked. He had found his life's work.

He read all the library books he could find on the subject. There weren't many, and they weren't that informative, but he read and reread them and he practiced until he got the technique right. With his last few dollars, he purchased a pair of Shaw figures, a boy and a girl molded of *papier-mâché*, from the Rothenberg Magic Company in Chicago. Just as he was starting his career professionally in 1899, disaster struck. His suit case, with both dummies, was stolen while he was riding on a streetcar, a horse-drawn vehicle which ran on tracks, like a trolley. It is at this early stage in his career that he made his first, and most lasting, contribution to the art.

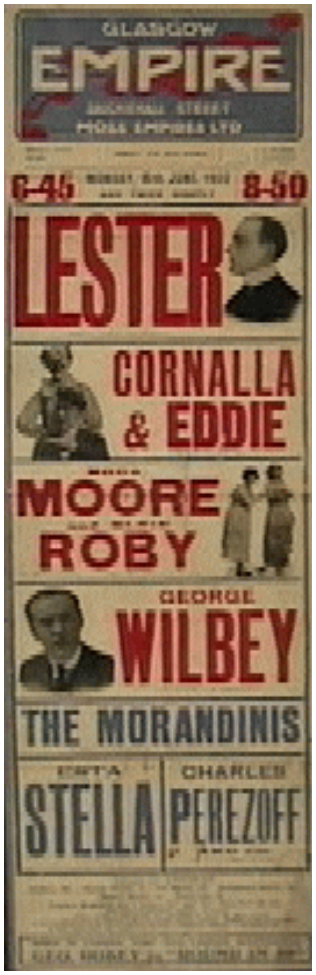
Unlike those performers of the past, about whom we know so little, Lester was a contemporary and there are many performers living today who will unhesitatingly attest to his greatness.

Lester's fascinating saga includes his contributions to the figure making art along with his "discovery," Frank Marshall, carver extraordinary, who also became a legend in his own right, and is recounted in the chapter, "The Birth of the Dummy." In fact, his genius was in his performance, his influence on the art epoch-making and

his overall impact on other performers was so influential that he appears in many places in this book. If we were to give him a certificate it would probably read:

> WE FELLOW VENTRILOQUISTS AWARD TO
> THE (INDISPUTABLE) GREAT LESTER
> THE "CHARLIE AWARD"
> IN "GREAT- FUL" APPRECIATION FOR
> A LIFETIME OF
> UNSURPASSED ACHIEVEMENTS,
> DEDICATION AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO
> ALL FACETS OF VENTRILOQUISM,
> AND TO YOUR MANY FRIENDS IN THE ART.

The theft of his dummies created a turning point in ventriloquism. For the next thirty years, Lester changed the course of his chosen art, pleasing appreciative audiences around the world with his ventriloquial technique. They responded with plaudits and praise. With an obvious allusion to his magical past, he believed that... "Ventriloquism is a matter of artful deception wherein the tongue is quicker than the ear." He lived by this concept and built routines around his superb technique. Although he was very famous in his day, many who follow in his footsteps today are probably unaware that The Great Lester was the leader; the innovator. This exceptional showman is considered the "Father of Modern American Ventriloquism," and the many reasons why, appear in the chapter, "The Golden Age," an era he helped to create.



His ability and influence were so great that when Edgar Bergen had attained fame himself, he told his listeners on one early Rudy Vallee radio show, that he had actually learned the art from Lester. A grateful Bergen not only aided Lester financially but acknowledged him as the greatest ventriloquist he had ever known. I heartily concur. Truly, "The Great Lester... None Greater!"

Vaudeville itself reached only a part of America and the world. While there were none greater than Lester, there was one ventriloquist who became known far and wide, for far longer. He was a student of Lester's and later his friend.

Edgar Bergen

We now come to the essence of these awards — the one performer who had his very own *Charlie*. It would be unthinkable to close this chapter without presenting a *Charlie* to the inspiration of, and model for, this award, Charlie McCarthy, and of course, to his alter ego, creator, collaborator, partner and pal of fifty-six years, the inimitable Edgar Bergen. Had I not done so I am certain Charlie's distinctive voice would have been heard to threaten, "Forget me and I'll clip you. So help me I'll mow ya down."

Around the world these two names are nearly synonymous with ventriloquism, which Bergen raised to new heights. He is its most distinguished and undisputed modern master who is mistakenly, (though understandably), assumed, by some, to have even created the art.

Bergen was not only a popular and astonishing performer with splendid talents, but a beautiful human being, a mild mannered, soft spoken, shy gentleman. His partner was not. Bergen's worldwide awards, good deeds and charitable works are well known. The Bergen Scholarship, at the Northwestern University School of Speech, benefitted such students as Chloris Leachman, Charlton Heston and Patricia Neal. Of course, Charlie later received an honorary degree from Northwestern as "Master of Innuendo and the Snappy Comeback!" The Bergen Foundation for Student Nurses, established in 1951, encouraged numerous young women to enter that profession. Who was this generous man?

The year the Wright Brothers went airborne, and Henry Ford opened his automobile factory, Edgar Bergen was born Edgar Bergren in Chicago, Illinois on February 16, 1903. His father owned the Bergren Dairy. As with many predecessors, Bergen discovered his talents while in elementary school. He didn't know how to define what he was doing until someone said, "You're a ventriloquist." He looked up the word and discovered that he was, indeed!

For 25¢, he ordered *Herrmann's Wizard's Manual*, a booklet on magic and ventriloquism. Not

Alexander Herrmann, 1843-1896. put out several similar books with Wizard's Manual in their long titles.

Wizards' manual, secrets of magic, black art, mind reading and ventriloquism as performed by all the celebrated professors of the world.

Wizards manual; a practical treatise on mind reading, ventriloquism, sleight of hand, secrets and methods of performing many marvelous mysteries, such as have astonished the public of all nations.

Herrmann's book of black art; magic made easy, containing a grand assortment of magic illusions as performed by the leading magicians and wizards of the day; also contains tricks with cards made use of by noted gamblers, ventriloquism, alchemy, necromancy, etc.

Book of magic; the wizard's manual, also containing instructions in ventriloquism and spiritualism. Chicago, H. Rossiter Music Co. [n.d.]

having a role model to emulate, he practiced incessantly. Eventually he would serve as an inspiration and role model for Paul Winchell and Jimmy Nelson, among others. He performed for young audiences at churches, Boy Scout meetings and numerous other organizations.

His preoccupation with his new hobby caused his school grades to suffer. In class, instead of paying attention to his lesson, he began sketching designs for a dummy. The look of a fresh, street-smart Irish newsboy, named Charlie, who worked near his school, fascinated him. In his history book, he sketched his version of the boy and took his artwork to Theodore Mack, the woodcarver who was creating heads and figures for ventriloquists at this time. Here is where we enter into a longstanding controversy, "Who carved Charlie McCarthy?" For many years Frank Marshall, renowned figure maker claimed the honor. For just as long, Bergen claimed Charlie Mack did. The question has long been debated in the business. To resolve it, we turn to two respected experts in the field who have studied the question and the evidence.

The first is versatile Alan Semok, also known as The Dummy Doctor. He is both a ventriloquist and figure maker, who is intimately familiar with both Mack and Marshall figures as a result of having repaired and refurbished dozens of both over the last thirty or so years, along with those of numerous other makers.

> "According to my understanding of the facts at hand and the evidence I've seen, there is no doubt whatsoever about two things regarding the original Charlie McCarthy.
>
> 1) He very definitely came from the Mack shop.
>
> 2) Frank Marshall (whose work I love and respect dearly, by the way) didn't carve the head and did not in fact even work for the Macks."

Here we turn to our second expert, John Arvites, who tracked down his idol, Frank Marshall, in his last years, when he was avoiding things ventriloquial and wished to be left in peace. In fact, even though Frank was retired, and no longer interested in making a figure, he enjoyed young John's deep dedication to the art and finally did make a custom one for him, the last one of Marshall's long and brilliant career. Though Frank befriended John, who treasures that figure, John's own independent findings, especially regarding dates of employment, lead to the same conclusion. We turn now back to Semok's investigation:

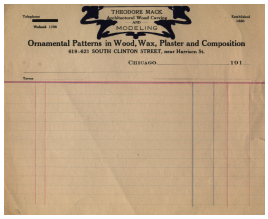
> "We do know that the original Charlie McCarthy puppet was from a stock design carved out by someone [at the shop] working a duplicarve-router, [a device that follows or traces the design or master on one end and reproduces it with a spinning cutter in a block of wood at the other end] and then the head was somewhat customized at young Bergen's urging by changing the nose and the cheeks. For that reason, he is somewhat unique among Mack figures, but still

bears many identifying features. Most other Mack puppets produced were basic duplicarved stock designs."

So how did the controversy start? Semok explains:

> "Apparently, Frank Marshall's association with the Mack workshop was somewhat embellished, a kind of publicity hype that was perpetuated and aided by the Great Lester, with some help from W.S. Berger. This comes directly from the horse's mouth, in a letter written by the Great Lester. The way I have come to understand the story as documented by the Lester letter and some other corroborating evidence is that Marshall himself was never in the direct employ of the Macks. Upon their passing, the shop was taken over by one Alex Cameron, and the shop was in turn sold to Frank Marshall...who evidently didn't come on the scene until as late as 1928. By this time Edgar Bergen was already established as a fairly big "name" in vaudeville and it was very much to Frank's advantage to claim parenthood of Charlie McCarthy, and he did so in all of his early catalogues with some legitimacy insofar as he was indeed the successor (however indirectly) of the Mack workshop. Again, it was apparently Marshall's friend Lester who initiated and helped develop the publicity angle of Marshall's having made Charlie McCarthy. Thus, it all makes sense to me, since there really is surprisingly little similarity between them (other than a family resemblance of Marshall's earlier figures to Mack figures which was a result of his continuing to use the Mack duplicarver patterns...even so, there are big differences between the finished products)."

Mack charged Edgar $35 for the job for which he received $17.00 as a down payment and $1.50 a week in installments until he was paid up. Young Bergen was grateful, and in deference to his inspiration and benefactor, he named the figure Charlie Mack. Later he added "Carthy," a wig of red hair, and a brash personality. For his efforts, he wound up with the best investment anyone ever made; without a doubt, the most precious and precocious block of wood on record (and on stage, screen, radio, television, and many other things for that matter, too).


THEODORE MACK
McCLELLAND
Ornamental Patterns in Wood, Wax, Plaster and Composition
819-821 SOUTH CLINTON STREET, near Harrison St.
CHICAGO, 191
A Mack bill - perhaps young Bergen received one

On record

Bergen's history teacher, Miss Angel, (a prophetic name as it turned out) sternly warned him that he would not graduate from Lake View High School unless his studies improved. Shortly after receiving this dire news Bergen appeared in a student talent show with his new partner, Charlie. They proceeded to heckle the faculty,

Bergen with Charlie and Laura before Charlie becomes the suave and debonair fellow we know. (ca. 1920)

much to the amusement of his fellow students. The following day, Miss Angel told him to remain after class. Fearing the worst, he was surprised when she smiled and said, “I didn’t know you were a genius. You must give this joy to the world. It needs laughter more than it needs history teachers.” She told him if he promised to try, she would help him with his school studies. Her encouragement and coaching gave him the necessary confidence, and he did graduate. Miss Angel was indeed a guiding spirit.

Simplifying his name from Bergren to Bergen, he now started to make history on his own. By performing with Charlie dressed as a newsboy, Edgar financed his way through college. For four years, Bergen and McCarthy were famous faces on the Northwestern University campus in Evanston, Illinois. They honed their act and earned tuition and living expenses by entertaining at fraternity and sorority functions, college dances and wherever else they could find paying gigs. Charlie boasted that he never took a nonperforming job. On the other hand, Edgar had to take other jobs, when *he* was not performing. While Charlie had time off, Edgar worked in movie houses as a projectionist, and in theaters as a janitor and usher. Being an usher wasn’t that bad since he was able to see and meet many famous artists, among them, The Great Lester.

He paid his show business dues by appearing at theaters across the United States and Canada. He worked the small-time vaudeville circuits and gradually earned a reputation as a solid act. At the pinnacle of vaudeville, he performed his famous scene *The Operation* at the prestigious Palace Theater on Broadway, in New York.

Bergen realized that as the places he played and his status as a performer increased in importance and class, the character of his partner and the content of his act must also change. An engagement at the exclusive Helen Morgan Club, a chic, prohibition era café that attracted the crème de la crème of show business, finance, society and the underworld, gave him an idea.

Seeking instant recognition, he thought of *Esquire Magazine*, the sophisticated men’s monthly, (forerunner of *Playboy* and *Penthouse* magazines). It featured a distinctive logo; a cartoon character called “Esky.” This tiny, debonair, rakish figure with a mustache looked a bit like the fellow in the Parker Brothers game Monopoly. Bergen wrote *Esquire* requesting permission to use Esky’s face for his dummy. They almost granted his request, but ultimately did not. Their loss. Rather than drop the idea completely, Bergen modified it. He created a non-royalty-paying model. The Irish newsboy in ragged clothes and jaunty cap was transformed into a debonair young, devil-may-care man-about-town, in full tuxedo, top hat and monocle; the trademarked version that the world came to know and love. Bergen altered his own wardrobe to white tie and tails. These changes not only added much class to the act, they established the direction his comedy and career would go for the rest of his life.

The new, suave Edgar Bergen and the witty, pert and impertinent "playboy" known as Charlie McCarthy, were instantly acclaimed by the jaded patrons of the Helen Morgan Club. Other vaudeville and supper club dates followed. The team was booked into such famous night spots as Chicago's Chez Paree and Hollywood's Club Casanova, where they attracted the affluent, as well as celebrities. Cary Grant was so overwhelmed by Bergen's talent that he offered to become his manager.

In 1936 Edgar Bergen received the booking that would lead to his becoming a show business immortal. Elsa Maxwell, a noted New York society matchmaker and hostess to the stars, had enjoyed seeing the team at the Helen Morgan Club. She arranged to have Edgar and Charlie appear at the famous Rainbow Room in Radio City. They were hired to heckle Noel Coward - the charming English wit, writer and performer, at a private party in his hon or. This type of speech, where you first flatten and then flatter the honoree, later came to be called "Roasts" and are most associated with New York's Friar's club. Noel and the guests loved the performance. It appealed especially to Coward's offbeat sense of humor. Elsa Maxwell was so pleased that she arranged for Bergen and his buddy to appear on the *Rudy Vallee Fleischman Yeast Hour*, a top variety program which showcased singers and comics... on radio!

Click to hear the intro to The Rudy Vallee Show

The broadcasting executives, as might be expected, had their doubts regarding the feasibility of a ventriloquist on radio. Nevertheless Rudy Vallee, a veteran showman and visionary thought well of the idea. He had seen Edgar and Charlie at the Chez Paree and recognized his potential. When asked, "Why a ventriloquist?" Vallee responded, "Why not?"

Bergen had many "firsts" to his credit. In addition to being the first ventriloquist on radio, he was also the first genuine ventriloquist to appear as such in films, and the most often, as well. Until that time, the part of a ventriloquist had been portrayed by actors, such as Lon Chaney and Eric von Stroheim. Mr. Bergen needed no director to tell him how to play the part. And he did real ventriloquism, instead of dubbing the voice.

Why not indeed. On December 17, 1936, Edgar Bergen got his big break; and so did a nationwide audience which responded enthusiastically. Bob Feller, producer of the show was later heard saying, "I thought it was crazy, a vent and a dummy on the air. You'll never make the public believe one man was supplying both voices and, even if we could, no one would appreciate it because they can't see the dummy. Boy was I wrong."

Boy, was he ever. Yet even Bergen, too, partially agreed with the sentiment at the time. "It was absolutely the last place in the world a ventriloquist should go, and sometimes doing the absolutely wrong thing works," he said.

Yet, sometimes wrong is relative. There was a precedent in the vocal illusions provided by a popular show called *Sam and Henry* when it moved to NBC. That name was owned by the original station so they chose a new one — *Amos and Andy*, in 1928. These were two white guys in blackface — minstrels (minus music) on radio! Amos Jones (Freeman Gosden) and Andrew H. Brown (Charles Correll) were on the air through 1960 — making it the longest-running series in radio history.

Another program started the same year as Bergen. Seven-year-old Baby Snooks had her own show by that name, but she was really Fanny Brice, an adult comedienne whose life was portrayed years later in the play and movie, *Funny Girl*, where she was played by the talented Barbra Streisand.

Ad for Charlie McCarthy's Radio Party Game.

The listeners used their imagination in ways we no longer have many opportunities to try. Bergen on radio actually harked back to the days of yore, when ventriloquists performed with invisible characters, off-stage or occasionally, as mimics who even, at times, stood behind screens, only to reveal at the end that they had provided all the voices in the conversations. The successful radio debut was followed by a succession of encores with Vallee, through April of 1937. The next month, May 9, the dynamic duo were rewarded with their very own radio show, *The Chase and Sanborn Hour*, which was also known at first as *The Charlie McCarthy Show*, even though it was standard procedure to use the name of the straight man first.

Click to hear the intro to The Chase and Sanborn Hour

It was an instant hit. It became America's radio listening habit; people planned their Sunday activities around that time-slot and even canceled other engagements if they conflicted. Church leaders held evening services after the show. It evolved into the highest rated radio program of all time. Poll after poll, survey after survey, year after year, especially for the first three years when they were at the very top, all reported that Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy owned Sunday night. On one Sunday, their show had a technical problem which resulted in "dead air," at 8:12, so when thousands of impatient listeners turned their dials to the *Mercury Theater*, in the same time slot on a rival network, that fateful evening of October 30, 1938, they heard a frightening news broadcast. It was set up as a program of music interrupted by reports of some bursts of light on the planet Mars. Later came reports of an object landing on Earth at Grover's Mill, New Jersey. Then came an attack by Martians which spread along the east coast. But, having enjoyed Charlie's banter first, they had tuned in **after** the introduction in the first few minutes, (and repeated a while later) which said that the show was only an **enactment**, led by actor/director Orson Welles, of the H. G. Wells story *War of the Worlds*. To the uninformed, and somewhat uncritical

Charlie McCarthy's "Radio Party Game." A 1938, die cut cardboard premium from Standard Brands. It has 21 figures; one of Charlie McCarthy and four each of Edgar Bergen, Don Ameche, Dorothy Lamour, Nelson Eddy and Robert Armbruster. There is also a spinner which determines the play.

listener it was “real,” but when the reporter “sees” people vaporized by a heat ray in front of his eyes, he reports it with less emotion than if he were reporting a heat wave in the summer. The performers or the listeners should have at least remembered the tragedy of only a year before, when, in 1937, the German airship Hindenberg [picture it like the Goodyear Blimp but nearly the length of the Empire State Building, and without the moving sign] crashed. WLS and NBC announcer Herb Morrison was on the scene, (which really *was* in New Jersey at Lakehurst) for a routine voice-over for a newsreel about its landing when suddenly, before his eyes, the airship exploded, bursting into flames. He gave an overwhelming, emotional eye-witness account of a catastrophe nobody had contemplated, even though it was filled with thousands of cubic feet of the highly flammable gas, hydrogen enclosed in a flammable skin. Obviously the lessons from the Titanic disaster only two decades before, that one should not believe “nothing can go wrong,” seem to have been forgotten. On the other hand, the play, more or less, sounded enough like a “real” Martian invasion. Bergen and McCarthy’s invasion of the airwaves, however, was quite real and lasted for nearly twenty years, every Sunday night!

That is a long time. It required a continual supply of fresh material. New characters were recruited. Though Charlie McCarthy was still the top banana, (he would never relinquish the spotlight anyway) he had new foils for comedic contrast, while cleverly highlighting Bergen’s versatility. The supporting cast included the flirtatious spinster, Effie Klinker, affectionately named after senior script writer, Zeno Klinker, and the lovable simpleton, Mortimer Snerd. Lesser known members of the cast included, Podine Puffington (1950) A Southern Belle, Lars Lundquist, a life-size Swedish fisherman, Alphy, the opposite of debonaire Charlie — a ragged, bearded bum.

Mortimer was sketched by a German-born puppeteer and artist who went by the single name of Wolo, to Bergen's specifications. Virginia Austin, a noted puppeteer and creator of "Clippo" the popular clown marionette manufactured by Effanbee [Fleichaker and Baum] Toys, and which were sold in many stores, modeled him from the sketch

The producers of *The Chase and Sanborn Hour* had more than just their winning team; they had a show teeming with a galaxy of Hollywood stars too. Celebrities of the day lined up to be guests. Each week Charlie would heckle and trade quips with the likes of debonair Don Ameche, the Emcee of the show, screen sirens Dorothy Lamour and Lana Turner, singer Al Jolson, actor/director Orson Welles, comedian and radio personality Fred Allen, or the comedy duo at their height of fame, Abbott and Costello, for example. Charlie once told lovely Paulette Goddard, “Take away your face and figure and what have you got?” In one sketch of the ‘50s Charlie was all excited because he was going to marry Marilyn Monroe. When she arrived showing off more of herself than her dress, she told him she was wearing her wedding gown as “something borrowed.” He commented wryly, “You didn’t borrow enough!” The marriage is called off because Charlie will not pass the blood test.

Vaudeville ventriloquist turned comic, wit and radio personality, Fred Allen, had Edgar Bergen & Charlie McCarthy as guests on his radio show of October 7, 1945. The “plot” was that Charlie might leave Edgar to team up with Fred. Four years later, Allen’s show went off the air.

Bergen did not have to ventriloquize for the whole show, because the format was talk/variety. He and his announcer/MC would host singers, and Bergen would also interview people from many different fields, with the inimitable W.C. Fields himself, being one of the most popular guests, but usually to exchange barbs, with Charlie.

The incomparable W.C. was usually too busy to tune in, but while recuperating from an illness he heard the show and laughed so hard, he asked to be on it. Fields had such a good time, he dropped in often. The supposed long-running feud between Charlie and Fields helped the ratings and led to Bergen and McCarthy co-starring in *You Can't Cheat An Honest Man*, in 1939. Though mainstream movie books do not include it because it is not classy, it is to many, a classic feature film.

Among McCarthy's most quoted quips to the colorful Fields were two inspired by the war in Europe, "Mr. Fields, is that your nose or a new kind of flame thrower?" "Why don't you fill your nose with helium and rent it out for a barrage balloon?" Then there was the sly, "Do you mind if I stand in the shade of your nose?"

The irascible Fields did not take all of this guff without giving some back. First, it must be understood that in those days it was standard procedure for a show to send advance copies of their script to the advertising agency, the sponsor and the network. Bergen's program, *The Chase and Sanborn Hour*, had a script that Fields completely ignored. Fields was quite wealthy and was driven to the studio by his chauffeur. He also brought along an entourage which included his various secretaries, butlers, and others, including, since he was not well, nurses. Sunday night the show personnel, knowing of his iconoclastic ways, remained uneasy, concerned about what might have been his changes with the script he had been given. They would ask if there were any changes, but he had never sent in a script, and would let no one see his copy. He would lead the parade in and, when he was asked if there were any changes, just reply:

The duo started on NBC's Chase and Sanborn (coffee) Hour, until 1949, moving to CBS with Coca-Cola as the main sponsor.

> "No, I'm going to do it just as it is."
> But that was not true — ever...
> **...By extreme good fortune Bergen was a man with an exceptionally nimble mind, and he made out skillfully without cues.** [Emphasis added][45]

Time and again, Bergen is credited with an unusual ability to ad lib. Exchanges between the two friendly feuders resulted in some memorable unscripted ad-libs. One lucky audience witnessed this one:

> FIELDS: McCarthy, you're a haven for woodpecker's residue.
> McCARTHY: That's Okay, your nose could light up the entire Santa-Monica Expressway.
> FIELDS: So help me, McCarthy, I'll carve you into a Venetian blind.
> McCARTHY: Oh Mr. Fields... you make me - shutter!

Occasionally some of the humor cast a pale shade of blue, which some listeners enjoyed. However, it was before World War II when Hollywood, like the cleaned up vaudeville before it, and the rest of the country, still felt the constraints of Victorian style censorship, especially on radio, which was beamed into homes with children who could tune in any time and might hear inappropriate words and concepts, especially regarding sex, a a major taboo, but also foul or obscene language.

Charlie and Mae
Every Day's a Holiday
(Photo by Acme)

Most episodes had one title by which the show was identified, but were comprised of many unrelated skits, which usually zipped along. One program in particular was titled "Adam and Eve," although that skit was but a small segment, and did not even involve Bergen or Charlie. It was Mae West, the undisputed Grande Dame of Double Entendre and Indelicate Innuendo, who created quite a stir when she did the sketch with two other actors lampooning Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. In this slow moving eight minute bit she played Eve, along with the co-actors playing Adam and the snake. There was nothing blue in the routine. It was all based on her sexy intonation and subtle innuendo, which would be considered rather tame by modern standards. Some of the laughs from the studio audience must have come from expressions or gestures, because there is no dialogue when you hear them. Later in the program, she and Charlie had an odd, six minute sketch that was in the form of a contest, with an implied prize fight style, between the two. During this skit, it is revealed that Charlie had forgotten his keys at Mae's apartment. Again, it was all innuendo, however, the show, and especially Mae's parts and style, did ruffle the puritanical feathers of many staid listeners of that era. A subsequent apology by Bergen and Mae West managed to calm the situation. But that infamous show of December 12, 1937, referred to as the "Adam and Eve" broadcast, caused The Federal Communications Commission to reprimand the radio network. The FCC was so dismayed with the NBC radio skit, the skittish station immediately became dis-Mae(d) — by banishing Miss West from its airwaves for fifteen years. In fact, even to utter her name on NBC was taboo. On the other hand, Charlie/Bergen, the master(s) of innuendo and snappy comeback made a comeback, perhaps because, for his small part in it, the words did not come from an actual youngster, but from a dummy's lips.

Inevitably when people discuss Edgar Bergen, mention is made of the movement of *his* lips. "I saw him move his lips," is usually the critique, as though there is some reward for the revelation. Bergen was the first to admit that, at times, he often had less than perfect lip control. Charlie often reminded him, and everyone else, about it too. However, he was far more concerned with the overall conception and specific content, than the mere mechanics of the moment. "The chief fault with the present ventriloquists," Bergen often lamented, "is that some of them think all they have to do is keep their mouths shut. But their material is so poor."

Bergen took special pride in his dialogue creating much of it himself, though he relied on writers. Instead of trite question-and-answer gags, he developed a form of situation comedy. Every routine had a discernable theme or storyline which made it seem that Charlie and his friends were quite human. He usually tried to tailor each joke or quip to fit the personality of the character.

Edgar, and Charlie appeared in several full-length movies in addition to *You Can't Cheat An Honest Man*, which are listed in the chapter, "Fact, Fiction and Film." He also made comedy shorts, among the better known are *Two Boobs in a Balloon* (1934) and *Nut Guilty* (1935) for Warner Brothers. This led to some interesting engagements. Occasionally it would happen that Bergen and McCarthy would be seen "live," on stage, at the same time they appeared in these, and other Vitaphone shorts, on the big screen!

Then there was a situation that occurred in 1941. Here is the anecdote told by a contemporary and friend of the perpetrator. It appears in *The Compleat Practical Joker* by Allen H. Smith, and published by Doubleday & Company, Garden City, New York, 1953. Critical analysis of this strange affair will appear after the description of the incident which appears in the book under the chapter headed "Times Square Local."

> A dozen years ago [ca. 1941] the most famous juvenile creature in all Christendom was Charlie McCarthy. And on a Friday night, in the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, Edgar Bergen's celebrated dummy was kidnaped.
>
> The whole nefarious operation was engineered by Frank Farrell, who was then drama editor of the New York *World-Telegram*. There are some who think that Mr. Bergen was in on the play — that the kidnaping was a pure publicity stunt. I'm quite sure that wasn't so. There are others who think Mr. Farrell's motive was simply to create a good lively story for the front page of his newspaper. I doubt that, too. Mr. Farrell is a ribber. He is never happier than when he has a gag going. He knew that Mr. Bergen was in New York with Charlie and he knew they were staying at the Waldorf-Astoria. He found out that on this particular Friday night Mr. Bergen was going to a dinner party where he would not be expected to entertain. Mr. Farrell reasoned that the dummy would be left behind in the Bergen room.
>
> Mr. Farrell went to the Belmont Plaza and took a room for himself, using the name of E. Bergen. Then he telephoned the floor clerk at the Waldorf-Astoria.
>
> "This," he said, "is Mr. Bergen. I wonder if you would be so kind as to go into my suite and get Charlie for me. He's in a bag and you can have one of the bellboys bring him over to this party at the Belmont Plaza."
>
> Before long the bellboy arrived, carrying the bag, and handed it over to Mr. Farrell. Mr. Farrell sat around and admired his

achievement for a while, then got another daring idea. He checked out of the hotel and went to the Stork Club, where he placed the bag in the checkroom. He strolled on into the club and was startled to find Mr. Bergen sitting at one of the tables. He didn't stay long in the club, for he began to get nervous, fearing Mr. Bergen might somehow catch a glimpse of that bag. So Mr. Farrell left with it and took it down to the neighborhood of the Battery, where he found a place to hide it.

A few hours later the abduction of Charlie was discovered. Mr. Bergen had a sort of Scandinavian tantrum over it, and his floor at the Waldorf-Astoria was soon swimming with police detectives.

Early on Saturday morning Mr. Farrell arrived at his newspaper to find the place in a mild uproar over the kidnaping. At the city desk he was told that no trace of the dummy had been found, that Mr. Bergen was genuinely upset, that Charlie McCarthy was insured for $2,500, and that whoever had done the job was in trouble.

Mr. Farrell finally walked over to Lee Wood, the executive editor, and said: “Lee, I've got a hot dummy on my hands.”

Mr. Wood and B. O. McAnney, the managing editor, told Mr. Farrell there was only one course open to him - he must go up and face Mr. Bergen and all those cops and confess. He did it, and was promptly placed under arrest. The photographer who went with him was arrested. He phoned Mr. McAnney, pleading urgently for help, and Mr. McAnney sent Alton Cook, a close friend of Mr. Bergen, to intercede. Mr. Cook was arrested. In the end the newspaper had to appeal to Thomas E. Dewey, then the New York District Attorney. Mr. Dewey felt that Mr. Farrell should be sent to Sing Sing, but finally agreed to let him off.

“It was fun while it lasted,” Mr. Farrell said later, “but I don't think I'll ever again kidnap a dummy as long as I live. From now on I kidnap nothing but live people.” [pp. 199-200.]

A snappy tale it is, so let us run through a quick review/summary. The author compliments Charlie and points out his fame. Then he looks at the two most obvious motives that people suggested, such as Bergen being in on it for the publicity or that Farrell wanted a hot scoop for his paper, and dismisses both. He knew the man as a practical joker, and figured that was all he needed. The prankster knew that Bergen was in town at the Waldorf-Astoria and would not need Charlie that night. Charlie would be alone and he set to his plan.

It goes on to explain that Mr. F. used the name of E. Bergen to rent a room for himself at the Belmont Plaza. With that in place he called the clerk at the real Bergen’s hotel, claiming to be Edgar Bergen with a request for them to enter “his” suite and “get Charlie for me,” and have a bellboy bring him over so that he can entertain at a party at the Belmont. This happens according to scheme, except that he is not Bergen, and has no plans to perform anything with Charlie except a vanishing

act — which he does accomplish, but he does not simply leave the bag in the room where he had just checked in, he checks out, bag and all, and goes to a top night spot with it. Why? There he checks Charlie with the coat room. Then he spots the real E. B. and gets out of there too, in a real hurry, lest Bergen spot the bag. He goes downtown and hides the bag, a very valuable property, in some undisclosed location and it is quite vague on this. Not long after, Charlie is discovered to be AWOL. Bergen, understandably, does not take this well and soon the police are swarming all over the place. A whole night goes by.

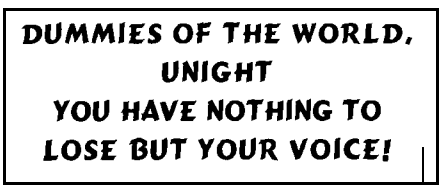
Mr. Farrell arrives early the next day at his office and the hot topic of discussion is the episode he had recently perpetrated. He is told a few things that he knew as well as some he could have figured out on his own. He was told that the dummy had not been found. No surprise to him. He was told that Bergen was upset, and that Charlie was insured for a modest sum. He heard that the perpetrator was in hot water. No revelations here. What did he expect? Seeing that the whole thing got out of hand, but not really explaining what would have been "in hand," he walked over to his executive editor and quietly spilled the beans. He was told that his only recourse was to go to Bergen and the police and face the music. Why? He could have called anonymously and told them where to find Charlie. He could have made some anonymous arrangements at a restaurant coat check room and told them where to find the coat check. He was not planning to collect "ransom" money, so he would not have been caught picking it up. But he did go and tell all and when he did, he was arrested, along with a news photographer who went with him. The editor sent a friend of Bergen's to straighten the mess out and he was also arrested. Finally they appealed to New York's Governor Dewey (the fellow who later would go to bed expecting to be president but would wake up to find Truman had won.) Governor Dewey was torn between giving him a long prison term and dropping the whole matter. He dropped it. And that ended the case of the kidnaped dummy."It was fun while it lasted," Mr. Farrell said later..." Fun? For whom? It sounded more like an anxiety nightmare, for everyone, but just how long did the "fun" *really* last?

It is a lively but dubious tale where several questions can be raised about the truth, the whole, truth and nothing but the truth to this story, that the author seems too easily to simply overlook. First, the floor clerk was not asked to have a bellboy bring just any bag, he was asked to bring "Charlie" who was in the bag, so he knew what errand he had sent a bellboy on and what was in his charge, "the most famous juvenile creature in all Christendom." This was no sack of laundry or dinner jacket. Second, he had to deliver it to someone and that would be Mr. Bergen at the Belmont. Okay, so why would "Bergen" rent yet another room at another hotel? Perhaps he needed a hideaway. Then why use the name Bergen to check in? Why did Farrell even bother, he could have used an alias and had the bag brought to a room number. If he wanted to "prove" he was the real Bergen by having a room in his name, why would he have another room at another hotel for the same night? In any case, an E. Bergen would be a name that was hard to forget. The bellman from the

Waldorf would wonder why he was bringing Charlie from Bergen staying at the Waldorf to Bergen staying at the Belmont. Also, Bergen's face was better known than anyone found on a wanted poster, yet the bellman delivered it to Mr. Farrell. Even if Farrell said, "I'll take it to Mr. B." it would not suddenly be forgotten and soon after word of the kidnap was all over the place and the hotel was swarming with detectives, it would be surprising to find that the clerk, or the bellman, who had to leave the premises and his post to deliver the bag, would not be sought by the police for questioning, especially since there was no forced entry. **That** would make **all** the hotel staff suspect! Interviews would have turned up the fact that an E. Bergen was also at the Belmont, and might have helped to unravel the knotty puzzle. True, the floor clerk and the bellboy might have felt that they would get into trouble for what they did, so they might have kept quiet at the start, but once **every** hotel employee was a suspect, things would heat up mighty fast. Once the truth came out, what happened to them then? Why did a news photographer accompany Farrell when he confessed to the police? Why did he not return it anonymously? Why didn't he simply claim to have received it anonymously? What exactly was going on in Mr. Farrell's mind when he perpetrated this in the first place? What did he think would happen when such a famous figure vanished? And anyway, how and where was he planning to return it **before** the police were called in? What exactly was "the prank?" Did he naively think the police would **not** be called in? Why did a whole night go by? There are just far too many gaps. Watch your bags.

It is also important to note that although Bergen's show ran for nearly twenty years, an admirable record and a difficult achievement, he was at the top of the chart only for the first three years, and this incident happened around the fourth year as ratings were slipping a bit. Perhaps it is only a coincidence, perhaps it was someone else's idea to "help" Bergen's ratings, or perhaps the author's conclusion was wrong. Maybe someone knows the real truth.

The *Citizen-News* of Hollywood, reported on October 18, 1949, one clever publicity ploy by Charlie who organized the UDA, (United Dummies of America), to get a raise from his 75 cents a week allowance. Some potential recruits were Broadway Eddie accompanied by The Great Lester, who was listed as the oldest ventriloquist in the world, even though John Cooper was alive and well, and Winifred Hensley, the youngest ventriloquist at the time. Charlie carried a "handmade," hand printed picket sign with unique spelling, and which implored;



The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences honored Edgar and Charlie for their roles in *The Goldwyn Follies*. On March 10, 1938, the team was recognized

with a special award for “Comedy Creation.” They were presented with a one-of-a-kind “Oscar,” a miniature version made out of wood, with a movable mouth.

Charlie’s comment on the situation, greatly amused the assembled Hollywood celebrities. “It’s really remarkable that anyone could carve a statue so *small*,” criticized Charlie. “Carved out of wood! Hmmm! A bit of sarcasm, I suppose.” Bergen rebuked Charlie’s bad manners. Charlie apologized. “Well, thanks anyway... even if it isn’t gold. But if you have a gold one left over, I’d like to have it.” It is now at the Museum of Broadcast Communications in Chicago, Charlie’s hometown, along with other memorabilia.

In 1947 Edgar Bergen performed what he considered his favorite role, that of Mr. Thorkelson, in the film version of *I Remember Mama*. He enjoyed this role so much because it was the first time he appeared as an actor portraying a character, rather than “Charlie’s partner.” With his Swedish background, he was a natural. He later performed without Charlie in other movies too. Bergen’s last screen venture was a cameo appearance in *The Muppet Movie*, released in 1979, which long-time admirer Jim Henson dedicated to his friend’s memory.

At the height of their fame sundry souvenirs bearing the likeness of Edgar, Mortimer, and especially Charlie, appeared on the scene. Some were sold in stores, some were only available as premiums for box tops and labels from cereals, soft drinks, coffee, etc. Bergen and/or his pals appeared on or in the shape of: windup toys, games, jigsaw puzzles, silverware, handkerchiefs, cast iron coin banks, chewing gum, soap, records with ventriloquism lessons and some of their routines taken off the air, and myriad other Bergen and, mostly, McCarthy artifacts, too numerous to list here. Although they had little or no cash value at the time, today they are highly treasured by collectors and nostalgia buffs.

Enlarge to see the lines of this puzzle.

Rare handkerchief

Click here to flip through a gallery of Bergen and Charlie Memorabilia.

A premium glass

However, they are merely reminders of the man and his partners. It is Bergen’s life that is *the* genuine memorial to him and to his love, the art of ventriloquism, and to all the people he inspired to take it up and keep it alive and well. He could also poke fun at himself as when he once said, “I don’t place much faith in the old saw, ‘A man is known by the company he keeps.’ My closest company for most of my life have been dummies.”

Sometimes Charlie stood on his soap box, sometimes he was in it.

Ever the showman, Bergen wanted to top off his career with a finale that "left 'em laughing." At a press conference on September 21, 1978, he announced his retirement and the news that Charlie would reside in the Smithsonian Institution. Charlie's flip response, "Well, at least I won't be the only dummy in Washington." [Surely not, Charlie, you'd enjoy the chapter "Ventriloquism Enters Politics."]

A week later, on September 29, Bergen gave his final performance on a show with singer Andy Williams at Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas, Nevada. After wowing the audience with a riotous routine, he closed by telling his enthusiastic fans, "Every vaudeville act must have an opening and a closing. So does a career and I think the time has come for me. So I'll pack up my jokes and my little friends... and say... goodbye." The band played the *September Song* as he left the stage.

A Charlie hand puppet waves good-bye.
Courtesy Todd Stockman

The man who moved his lips moved his audience too. They gave a long, tearful, standing ovation of deep respect, and immense gratitude, to the unequaled superstar who had delighted everyone on stage, in night clubs, in movies, on radio, and television for over fifty years. His large legacy includes his son Chris Bergen and his lovely daughter Candice Bergen. She achieved stardom, and later also had a successful feud of her own, between her character, the single, unwed mother Murphy Brown and none other than the person who started it, the Vice President of United States, J. Danforth (Dan) Quayle. Charlie's lifelong partner has earned a special place in our art and our heart.

Bergen, at various times, confessed, "An audience and laughter...that's my dope; that's what I live on; that's my kick." Perhaps the thought of retiring was too much to take. The next day the world was saddened to learn that he had died in his sleep. The master was gone. His tight-knit little family... Charlie, Mortimer, Effie, Podine, and all their other friends of many years, became silent orphans. Their banter, quips and wit have surely been missed.

Fifteen years after Bergen's death, the United States Postal Service honored his memory. It commissioned the well-known artist and cartoonist, Al Hirschfeld, to create a caricature of the Bergen and McCarthy team for a postage stamp in a series of comedians. Bergen would certainly have given his stamp, his stamp of approval. Charlie would surely have mowed 'em down if he were left out.

Incidently, this wasn't the first stamp to honor the most famous ventriloquism pair. In 1991 Grenada produced a stamp with their photograph, for the anniversary of the USO, the United Services Organization, which entertained troops abroad during WWII. Obviously, the shenanigans of Bergen, McCarthy and the rest of the crew kept up the morale of the soldiers, in the grand tradition of Alexandre, Blitz and others before him.

They are fitting tributes to a man who popularized ventriloquism for an entire generation, as the clean, fun form of family entertainment that it can be at its best, and who gave us all the one and only, "Charlie."

That classic, iconoclastic American icon, Charlie, and his longtime foil and partner, Bergen, were known throughout the world. While the art has gone through many stages, over time and around the world, as well, there have been many other ventriloquists practicing the art on myriad stages the world over, too. Just ask Shakespeare.

In 1941, Edgar Bergen got a patent for a doll head in the shape of a fish, that wore lipstick.
That same year he commissioned Fairchild Aviation to custom build an F-24W airplane with a wingspan of over 36 feet, for his personal use. It is on display in Seattle, Washington, at the Museum of Flight, which is the largest air and space museum on the west coast.

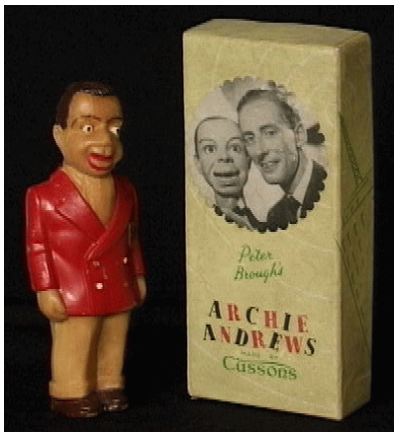
Part Two

Every Country Has One

Shakespeare said, “All the world’s a stage...” which is certainly true for ventriloquism. “A Series of Theories” listed the unique names for ventriloquism in different languages, which all have a common thread — that country’s words for belly and speak. Though the language may differ, ventriloquism offers entertainment that produces laughter, amusement and amazement; these ingredients are the secret to its universal appeal. Not only are there different ways of saying ventriloquism in each language, there are languages that incorporate ventriloquism into their speech. “Transformation in African Verbal Art: Voice, Speech, Language” in the *Journal of American Folklore* abstract says:

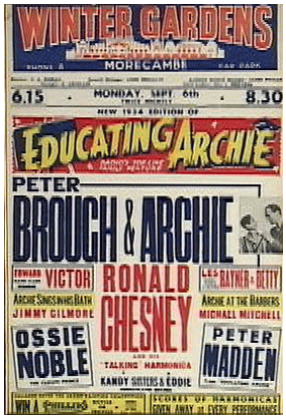
> ...the processes by which the voice, speech, and even language itself are transformed during the production of African verbal art. Transformations of voice include pitch modification, ventriloquism, and whistling; in transformation of speech there is often sound substitution;[46]

All over the globe, there are home-grown practitioners of the art, in some form or other, be they cultural, religious or theatrical, amateur or professional, several of whom have been mentioned in previous chapters. While recognizing that the appeal of the art is nearly universal, not everyone in every country could possibly be included. Some are mentioned only briefly, sometimes as a source of inspiration to the reader, other times merely to keep their name alive, and always to give just an inkling of the vast ingenuity ventriloquists bring to their art and share with their appreciative audiences.



Archie soap was a popular item with moms who hoped the kids would actually use it.

Though “every country has one,” in Great Britain, special mention must be given to three. They were the superstars Fred Russell, Arthur Prince, and Tom Coram who are accorded their rightful place in “The Golden Age.” The art owes much to them.



Lobby card

Yet three would be too limiting. Take England's Arthur Brough, (Bruff) known for routines with a soldier dummy. He was the father of Peter Brough, considered to be England's counterpart to our Edgar Bergen. Like Bergen's popular partner, Charlie McCarthy, Peter's pal, Archie Andrews, appeared on, or as, artifacts such as soap, games, toys, premiums, etc.

Peter and Archie were highly regarded by the Royal family, appearing at command performances for Edward, then Prince of Wales. After one such engagement, the Prince inquired as to the method in which Peter operated the figure, making it appear so lifelike. Brough dutifully complied and handed Archie to His Highness. While fiddling with the doll, the Prince accidentally pulled the head from the body. Though taken by surprise, His Highness remained composed and humorously remarked, "This is the first time I ever beheaded one of my subjects."

On the other hand, British ventriloquists, while not actually beheading anyone, have been known to cause their audiences to laugh their heads off. The following fellows are mentioned because they're particularly good at it.

A gentleman named Tattersall did it by struggling with a life-size drunken figure. His countryman, famous Russ Carr, son of Fred Russell, had a "wooden soldier" with mechanical arms and legs that moved, rather than the typical stuffed appendages so common at the time. Another clever artist is Ray Allen, whose lip control is quite technically correct. Lord Charles, his monocled dummy gives politically incorrect lip, spoofing aristocratic society.

Similarly, Terry Hall, who is mentioned in "Talk to the Animals" looks at royalty from an entirely different perspective, through the eyes of Lenny the Lion, "king of the beasts." Even tame British audiences go wild with laughter. We leave Lenny, an imaginary lion, to go south of the equator, an imaginary line.

In South America, Richiardi, the great Peruvian illusionist, had a perplexing childhood. His father, Ricardo lzquierdo, was a noted ventriloquist who, like most Latin vents of the early 1900s, always performed with a stage full of dummies. Thus, Richiardi was born into a family of twenty-six dolls and a puppet dog. As a youngster he had become so accustomed to the theatrical, that when he saw a real, live dog in the street he automatically looked around to see who was working the strings.

Ricardo presented his many dummies on pedestals, which permitted him to stroll about the stage and speak to each character in turn. One day he and his assistant arrived at a theater with less time than usual to set up for the performance. In their haste, his assistant inadvertently placed the wrong head on a body. The curtain rose, the audience applauded and Ricardo went into his routine.

Suddenly he became aware that the beautiful blond head atop the body of a burly policeman was misplaced. Ricardo, a born trouper, didn't miss a beat. One of his other characters, a drunk, did a double take and with a slur made this ad-lib, "Ah ha! I always thought he was on the gay side."

Tom Coram once performed on a bill with a rather unique act. What kind of act? One that got top billing! Here was an English Mel Blanc. Val Andrews describes it:

> Hmm.. What is Harry Hemsley's act. Now I don't really know if he could count as a vent, he was more of a mimic, specifically a wonderful imitator of children's voices. However, he worked by holding a newspaper up, just above mouth level. I think if I quote his opening speech it would help. He would say, 'This is a very unusual form of ventriloquism that I present for I have no dolls and furthermore I make no attempt to stop my lips from moving. Yet I can introduce you to my imaginary children, Elsie, Winnie and Johnny. Are you there Johnny ? ' He would raise the paper as if reading it, and a voice would seem to come from the wings... Yes Daddy!!' and so on. One scene was at bedtime, with Harry as the father trying to settle in to reading his paper as the kids interrupted from their rooms. It was really 'distant voice' without lip control, and the audience loved it. Elsie's voice was terribly prim and practical, Winnie was younger and terribly cute, whilst Johnny was cheeky.
>
> His own voice was very like Edgar Bergen's. When Maskelyne's closed down he went on the halls but didn't do very well in variety, being much better for a sedate audience. He used to do private parties and Masonics etc. but it was radio that saved him. Once he had been 'discovered', he could, and did, present complete children's plays all on his own, and had a long running series, 'The adventures of Elsie, Winnie and Johnny'. In those days there was no commercial radio in Britain, (In fact the BBC still operates entirely without advertising.) But on the continent there were radio stations, commercial ones, that 'pirated' the English audience who could easily receive 'Radio Luxemburg' and 'Fecamp'. One of these stations presented a kids programme sponsored by 'Ovaltine' (A malt and milk tinned powdered beverage.) They wanted a troupe of Children to be called 'The Ovaltineys', a combination of Ovaltine and Tiny, but had trouble getting English speaking children for the show. Then they got a great idea and flew Harry Hemsley out there. He was most of the Ovaltineys, as well as doing his childrens plays and other bits. His success was well deserved because he was one of those mild, pleasant and completely harmless people who seldom get anywhere. Whenever he returned to England he got variety dates, but this time as top of the bill, and the audience, who had now all heard him on Radio Luxemburg, just loved him. (Some sort of moral to be gained from all that?)

EMPIRE
6.30 PENGE 8.45
Telephone: SYDENHAM 4241-2
Week commencing MONDAY, AUGUST 17th, 1936
THE PROPRIETORS OF "OVALTINE" HAVE PLEASURE IN PRESENTING
THE STAR ATTRACTION OF RADIO LUXEMBURG
OVALTINEYS CONCERT PARTY
THE MOST TALKED OF AIR PROGRAMMES
20 OVALTINEY SINGERS, ACROBATS, COMEDIANS, MUSICIANS, DANCERS AND ENTERTAINERS NEVER SEEN BEFORE ON ANY STAGE 20
JASS & JESSIE STABLE COMPANIONS
THE BUCKLEYS BOOMERANG HAT JUGGLERS
PETER WHITE COMEDIAN
MICHAELSON DRAWING THE LAUGHS
LOW AND WEBSTER EDUCATE YOURSELF
THREE ABERDONIANS To Make Us Tell you What They Do
CORAM & JERRY IN VENTRILOQUIAL SCENA
FRIDAY NIGHT IS CARNIVAL NIGHT
VALUABLE SPOT PRIZES WILL BE GIVEN AWAY AT BOTH PERFORMANCES

The bill from the Empire Theatre, 1936

Around the world ventriloquism is readily associated with the legendary artistry of Señor Wences, which is one reason he is mentioned in several chapters. As a youngster, he was particularly inspired and influenced by two voice manipulators. One was the outstanding showman Llovett, the other, Eugene Balderrain. Known professionally as "Balder," he used twenty-eight figures in his routines. His creations were innovative and deceptively clever. For example, he danced a charming waltz with "Dona Caneria," an attractive mechanical doll, who stood almost as tall as he. His favorite character was "Clito," an extremely realistic foppishly dressed figure, replete with cane, linen duster, derby hat and flowing tie. Clito, whose persona was that of a flesh and blood opponent, would engage Balder in a Greco-Roman wrestling match with Clito subduing Balder in an astonishing climax.

Balder's masterpiece, however, was a musical scene with six smaller figures, five men and a girl. Titled *La Orquestra Criolla* (The Creole Orchestra), Balder played the role of conductor. With the girl at the piano, two of the male dolls strummed guitars, two others played accordions, while the fifth was the violinist. As the musicians played their various instruments, Balder conducted, while discussing their technique and tempo. Balder wrote *Trato De Ventriloquia*. in 1910, and *Del Album De Clito*. 1914. In Spain and Latin America, Balder was highly successful with the fabulous repertoire he created.

Dramatic spectacles were developed by other Latin ventriloquists, as well. Leonardo, from Argentina, created a wedding scene using dummies in such key roles as the bride, groom, preacher, in-laws, and assorted guests. Leonardo sometimes packed his stage with as many as forty figures. For Leonardo and his traveling troupe, life was not always bliss; there were times things went amiss.

Leonardo sometimes had engagements where he did not need all his characters. In those situations, he would use only Pedro, a knee figure. Leonardo was a clever comic who, in addition to his set routines, liked to have Pedro ad-lib with the audience. Pedro would poke fun at almost anyone who seemed like a good target for a laugh. They thought they found one in a small town with a large police chief. This huge, overweight official had an equally big reputation for being strict and humorless. Inevitably, Leonardo and the chief were going to meet head-on.

Some of
Leonardo's figures
The girl blows bubbles with
'Bubble gum"

At the first evening's performance, Leonardo noticed three empty seats together in the front row of the auditorium. He wondered out loud who they might be for. Pedro loudly informed him, "Oh, those are for the chief of police. He'll be sitting in seats 4, 5 and 6."

The next evening Pedro made another joke at the chief's "expanse." Everything seemed to go well the third night, too, but as Leonardo was packing up, there was a knock on his dressing room door. When he opened it he was shocked to see a squad of police who served him with an arrest warrant. The

charge; “holding a public official up to ridicule.” Leonardo protested — the sergeant promptly informed him that **he** was not being charged; the warrant was for fresh-mouthed Pedro!

Leonardo, visibly shaken, explained that he needed Pedro to continue performing for the run of the engagement. The sergeant replied that his orders were not to interfere with the scheduled performances; Pedro would be released each evening in time for every show, then taken back to jail after the last bow. The sentence lasted for one week. Did the police chief really lack a sense of humor? If so, he certainly had the last laugh.

Hamburg, Germany was fortunate to have the comedy team of The Great Edgar and Joe Nemo. Edgar and Joe would walk out on stage together and then do a two-person stand-up comedy routine, after which they would walk off together. You can imagine the amazement of their audiences, when they finally realized The Great Edgar was a ventriloquist and “Joe Nemo” was his mechanical walking wonder doll. Sometimes, for publicity purposes, Edgar, with Joe in tow, would walk the streets of the town, hand in hand.

The Great Edgar and Joe Nemo

Another fine performer, Eric Everty, of Hanover, wore a a naval uniform when he performed throughout Germany after World War II. Everty closed his act by locking the dummy in a trunk. The audience always roared with laughter when the figure yelled, “Die Schachtel ist zu kurz.” (“The box is too short.”)

There are many fine performers today, including George Schlick who is well known for his talking Knight´s helmet, from a suit of armor, that interrupts his act. He is a master at the baby cry, has a cloth frog that smokes, and uses the well known bit with two people from the audience as dummies. He has a set act that has changed little for the past 20 years, but occasionally incorporates non-original material to extend it where required, usually for his TV performances. For example he used Axtell products and little standard bits of business that had been in use at public performances by other professional vents in Germany. On the whole a great technician, though on television, with the camera up his nose, there may be some telltale movement. He is a good, clean entertainer who served as the inspiration for many a vent in Germany and his influence lives on.

Andreas Römer may be familiar to convention goers, who only saw glimpses of this clever, unconventional performer. He deftly combines magic and ventriloquism. For example, he uses the baby cry and predicts the “Father” of the virtual baby with a color prediction effect and/or a name in a real diaper. His telephone voice is put to work in a clever routine where he “burns” the spectators money bill and calls his insurance agent, on a banana phone. The agent then faxes the lost money into the banana phone. Well, you get the idea, his is a good combination, using both techniques in an entertaining and original act. He has a Mary Ann Taylor old man named Hansen, a retired captain, and does a great talking cigarette bit.

Michael Schürkamp performs as Master Me (Mahster May) This talented fellow was a mime and magician, doing mainly kid shows. Then Stevo (Dr. Stefan Schüling) convinced him to concentrate on ventriloquism and introduced him to the work of Steve Axtell and Verna Finley. Michael followed the suggestions and has been a full time professional ventriloquist for several years. He still uses his raven Coco with children, has an Axtell dinosaur, and uses more and more humanoid characters, Elvira (by Verna), a retired opera singer, Horst Herpes (a Verna yokel figure), a Mortimer Snerd type and various others like an Axtell pig, and a Verna native American etc. Michael has created and performed several serious educational programs for museums in conjunction with special exhibitions about dinosaurs and also on Native Americans. With his background in teaching, Michael combined serious content with fascinating skills and a stage presentation that makes learning quite an entertaining experience.

Stevo and Theo

Then there is Stevo, himself, (Dr. Stefan Schüling) whose main partner, Theo Retical, is an Insull / Davenport figure with seven movements. It was previously owned and used by now-retired Canadian Gene Snead, and his picture with Theo, in his original role as "Monty," is in Vent Haven Museum. Stevo and Theo are a classic straight man/cheeky boy team in the traditional style, using a few well rehearsed dialogue bits and ad libs ad libitum. Stevo also uses a Mary Ann Taylor soft puppet old man figure (Fritz), an Axtell monkey and a Selberg Professor Freudstein. In addition to his performances, his main contributions to the art of ventriloquism, however, are probably through his other activities: Stevo has written a book on ventriloquism in German, introduced and conducted courses in ventriloquism and organized all-vent stage shows with several performers including American professionals Steve (Steve & Jack) Bernard and Stephen Knowles. Stevo has been a regular visitor of, and performer at, many of the Vent Haven ConVENTions and Las Vegas gatherings promoting the international aspect. Recently Stevo took over the trading tradition of the Dummy Depot from retired Captain Dick Wightman, and is now offering services under the clever, alliterative multilingual name "Deutsches Dummy Depot."

German Promotional postcard

Versatile Mario Maris, an Italian fellow, traded wisecracks with his dummy "Pierino" in four languages.

Fred Roby and his pretty wife Anela were a popular team of French ventriloquists who featured "Mickey," not the mouse, but a French poodle, naturally.

Bergen was seen in France

France was also the home of the charming Robert Lamouret and his puppet duck "Dudule." The high point of the act occurred when his feathered friend gave Lamouret a shave. Dudule held the shaving brush in his beak, and enthusiastically applied the cream all over Lamouret's face, into his eyes and even his hair, to the strains of "The Barber of Seville," and the mounting laughter of the audience. For some reason, perhaps the "look," this extremely funny duo was considered to be a ventriloquist act, but the duck never spoke a word, and Lamouret was not even a ventriloquist.

Claude Pujade-Renaud, wrote, *La Ventriloque*, published in Paris by Des Femmes. [c1978]

Brussels, Belgium was the home of Monarque who gave a startling exhibition. During his remarkable ventriloquial turn he would swallow a live goldfish and continue with the dialogue as though nothing out of the ordinary had taken place. At the conclusion of the act, he would regurgitate the goldfish into a bowl and watch it swim around. Claiming that he had originated this stunt, Monarque said that it had never been done before. It would not surprise anyone to know that, as far as we can tell, it has also never been done after.

The fabled land of elves, spirits and fairies would logically breed performers with an impish sense of humor. Eamonn O'Connor happily fulfills that role. His doll is, of course, a leprechaun. "Shamus" has side whiskers and a whiskey-induced, bright red nose. Eamonn and Shamus appear in a show called "A Taste of Irish," singing songs of Erin with talented Shamus topping his antics by dancing a jig. Shamus, a first-rate con man, heckles the audience in a lilting brogue. Most fans enjoy being picked on by the pixie puppet but some individuals take his harmless blarney seriously. At the end of a St. Patrick's day parade at the St. George Hotel in Limerick City, Shamus almost created a riot by tangling with a drunk in true leprechaun fashion. To end the row, Shamus advised the inebriated gent to "Behave yerself, boyo... or I'll put a spell on ye. Ya'll be sober the rest of your life, ya will." The frightened drunk beat a hasty retreat.

India, the land of snake charmers, fakirs who lie on a bed of nails or walk through hot coals, and home of the illusive and elusive Indian Rope Trick, seems to have had little to do with our ancient art of ventriloquism until the early part of the twentieth century. The first known book about ventriloquism was written in the Hindustani language and this is the English translation of the title: Lele, K. B., Dr:: *Various Magical Effects Compiled by Dr. Lele* (Pictures of ventriloquists and articles on ventriloquism appear on pp. 32, 44, and 51.) Published in Poona City, India: 68 pages. (ca.1920)

The earliest East Indian ventriloquist on record was Professor NAG, from Bengal, India. He was born in 1880 and he died in 1965 at age 85. He became a performing vent in the early 1900s, and it appears that he pioneered Indian ventriloquism. He pursued the art as a full time professional ventriloquist. As others like him around the world at the time, he was predominantly an exponent of distant voice ventriloquism and preferred performing without the use of a dummy.

The second Indian ventriloquist on record was a Mr. Bhosekar who performed under the stage name of Professor Bharatkuinar. He was born in 1895 and died in l975 at age 80. In India, it was he who started performing near ventriloquism with masks which he used as dolls. His performances date back to the early 1920s.

The next ventriloquist on record was Yeshwant Keshav Padhye of Bombay, India, who performed under the name of Professor Y. K. Padhye. Mr. Y. K. Padhye was an amateur stage actor, and a musician who played the Harmonium (an organlike keyboard instrument that produces tones with free metal reeds actuated by air forced from a bellows) and Tabla (a small hand drum of India). Professor Padhye first became interested in ventriloquism when he witnessed the performances of a ventriloquist who visited India during war-time as soldiers. One of these ventriloquist soldiers was a Mr. Voltaire of England.

Y.K. Padhye

Professor Y. K. Padhye was the first ventriloquist in India to use regular ventriloquial dummies in his performances, which date back to the early 1930s. Later he began performing with two dolls at a time. One routine included two “cheeky boy” dolls named, “Shyamu” and “Gampu” and another act consisted of two dolls named “Mr. Ardhavatro” and “Mrs. Avadabai” which made up an “odd married couple.”

Professor Y. K. Padhye was also a collector of ventriloquial dolls and he had the largest collection in India. His skilled performances earned him the esteemed title of “Shabdabhramakalaratna” which means, “Excellent exponent of the art of ventriloquism.” Among his other ventriloquial routines, the more popular were the doll playing the harmonium and singing at the same time, and a single doll shown as a Hindu, Muslim, Parsee, Sikh, and South Indian simply by using the appropriate cap which distinguishes these people from one another.

Ramdas Padhye "The Two Maharajas"

Following in the footsteps of his father, Y.K. Padhye, Bombay-born Ramadasa Padhye is also well known in his country. Ramadasa [Ramdas] performs at resorts and hotels, as well as having given command performances for such political dignitaries as the President and Prime Minister. He also appeared on Canadian TV with Cy Leonard on the *Uncle Bobby Show*. His crowning achievement was producing a full-length ventriloquial drama which included such diverse characters as a parrot and a dog. He wrote Bolavita Dhani Vegalaci, (1987) meaning, the art and craft of a ventriloquist and a puppeteer.

Kamal Haasan is considered India's most versatile actor, the Lon Chaney of Tamil, the town where he grew up. He has an illustrious career now, but in 1977 he played a ventriloquist for one of his earlier, minor movies, *Avargal* [*Them*]. He had to learn the art for the film. but, after he completed it, ventriloquism became his pastime.

K. S. Gode supplies professional figures in India.

Ogino

Japan has not had as many professional ventriloquists entertaining in secular venues over the years as some other countries. At one time a fellow named Ogino performed there in the 1940s. Female traffic control officers use a dummy for educational purposes, teaching children safety regulations. The Reverend Ichiro Noda founded a Ventriloquism Study group, which has grown quite large. It is dedicated to religious (gospel) ceremonies via the medium of ventriloquism and is more properly covered in the chapter "Gospel Ventriloquism."

Chinese ventriloquists have been more involved with the religious than the theatrical aspects of the art. For countless centuries Chinese people have worshiped their ancestors and still employ mediums to help them speak to the dead. This is, of course, a variation on classic spiritualism in which a living individual is the channel for a spirit of the departed. The Chinese refer to it as "KO-Che" (ko-chee) meaning "mouth technique." It is a form of exorcism or purification usually performed at weddings and funerals to ward off evil spirits. In more recent times it has been used to entertain, as well.

Cecil Parkee

Though Chinese by birth, Cecil Parkee settled in Australia where he performed professionally under the stage name "Lai Moon Chee" with his doll "Dim Sim." He performed in the major venues and is well respected. Though out of the limelight, he can still be seen performing now and again.

His feature act portrays the stereotypical role of a Chinese laundryman who speaks pidgin English. In a clever telephone routine, he argues with an irate customer who called to complain about a damaged shirt.

A certain fondness for artists of vocal manipulation "down under" helped Ron Blaskett, a native son, popularize this form of entertainment. In WWII Blaskett rose through the ranks to become Sargent. At one time he was even hospitalized. He entertained the troops along with his partner "Gerry Gee." Later, their fame on radio there, like that of Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy here, resulted in a line of Gerry Gee Junior Family of puppets, (top right) as well as games with ventriloquial themes, appearing on, and also promoting, premium items, making commercials and showing up in advertisements, such as the one for a drink (right) called Tarax.

Gerry Gee

While there have been many capable performers in Australia, for decades there had not been one who gained national attention until recently, when. American vent David Strassman captured the interest of the Aussies much as the clever Australian vents Chris Kirby and Clifford Guest did years ago in the U.S.A. Strassman even had his own television show, down under.

Donskoi with dog and coach

Gregory Donskoi holding figure of a life-like child

Russian vocal ilusionist Gregory Donskoi (1865-1956), founded a dynasty of Russian ventriloquists. He began his career in small showplaces, such as wax museums, then in the better variety halls, eventually appearing on revolving stages in circuses. He was known for creating eleven different voices in his sketches. (Wences would not do more than five, which just proves there are no hard and fast rules.)

In one of his routines a large dog pulled a golden coach out onto the stage. In it were several life-size figures with whom Donskoi conversed. But, the audience was never ready for the big surprise ending, which was having the real dog "speak."

During the Russian Revolution in 1917, as well as in World War II, Donskoi performed for the troops on trains, ships, and at the battlefront, à la a Russian Bob Hope. He and his daughter Maria delighted the soldiers with their talking dolls and funny repartee. After the war, daughter Maria and granddaughter Eugenia

Maria Donskoi and troll-like puppet

followed in Gregory's illustrious footsteps. They carry on the Donskoi tradition, by performing together throughout their country.

In 1900 an imitator of Donskoi's talking-dog routine was "King Kasini." He claimed that his dog not only spoke but could read people's minds. Kasini's 1914 poster advertised: (translation)

???MYSTERIOUS DOG JACK???

"Miracle of Nature - The dog JACK is the serious competitor of man in the field of guessing another's thoughts and clairvoyance. Professors, doctors, psychologists, students and all scientists of the world are interested in this mysterious dog JACK."

The "phenomenon" which "interested" the scientific community, was a theatrical hoax, of course. The so-called "talking dog" was actually equipped with a device operated by the ventriloquist via a control through the leash, and the movement was synchronized with the words he provided. We'll keep that a secret for those who still perform in that manner, but you could ask a figure maker all about it. You didn't need to be a scientist to figure it out. Anyone up close could see the fakery. An assistant walked through the audience asking the patrons for various items. This information was conveyed to Kasini by the manner in which the assistant worded the question. This kind of verbal code was used by vaudeville mind reading teams and is still used. Having the dog appear to respond was a clever variation on this theme.

Russians seem to be partial to "talking dogs." While this "phenomenon" was popular with the masses, skeptical officials insisted on "truth" in advertising. Gregory Bavitski (1896-1975) performed such an act and ran into trouble with unbelieving bureaucrats who challenged his claims. In 1929 the star was about to open his Bavitski Circus in a small native town. Local authorities, whose approval was required for anything the public was permitted to see, informed him that he would not be allowed to advertise the "talents" of his canny canine. Bavitski was summarily told, "The Commissars of Culture say it is a lie. Dogs cannot speak." Although they were correct, they missed the point. In the field of entertainment audiences willingly suspend disbelief. Having encountered officialdom in the past, Bavitski immediately took the animal to the Department of Culture to see the powers-that-be. Upon entering the room, the dynamic dog greeted the men in charge with "Hello, Comrade Commissars." The astonished officials, mouths agape, unhesitatingly granted permission for him to display the posters. Once again, the underdog wonder dog, aided by his faithful ventriloquist, triumphs over bureaucracy.

Note that the word “Humorist” apparently loses little in translation, and appears on the left in the banner above, amidst all the Russian in this advertisement.

Paco Miller

Many other countries have produced fine vocal artisans such as Paco Miller of Mexico, and his parrot partner. However, it is impossible to know of all of the fine performers who have entertained in the past or are currently performing around the world, so we have merely highlighted some here. The technique is fairly standard, but the differences in culture can be startling.

In the late 1960s I was part of a revue which included Lee Tulley, a great comic, Bobby Breen, singing sensation on the Eddie Cantor radio program, and a female singer whose name escapes me. We toured several cities in South Africa, where apartheid was the law. We usually performed for white audiences only, but were asked to entertain the native population in the Kraals, on our day off, which we were more than happy to do. I might even say relieved, since a policy of segregation was uncomfortable for me. When I appeared with my dummy Bruce I heard cries that, the time, I transliterated as "Takeelish! Takeelish!" while the audience members pointed to Bruce. [see box] I proceeded with my performance amidst gales of laughter, and was pleased that the interpreter was able to relay my jokes to this audience. The timing was not exactly what I was used to, but I figured it was not an easy task, considering the cultural and language differences.

Being chased by the natives with spears.

The audience checks out the act.

South African folklore tells of a fierce, invisible, being called the Tokoloshi, a half-hare half-man mythical figure. They are believed to be witchdoctor messengers. These tokoloshi, famous throughout Southern Africa, can be used by its owner for good or evil intentions. Though similar to a poltergeist, which makes its presence known with senseless destruction, the tokoloshi can also be called upon to "haunt" an individual or family. The legend of the Tokoloshi is very well-known but is associated mainly with the native Black population. Shashe wood carvers create small dolls to represent this half-man/half/hare-like creature in imaginative detail. The carved quality of Bruce is probably what struck a chord with the native audience. The strange word and accent in such unfamiliar circumstances are probably why it sounded like takeelish.

At the conclusion of the entertainment I thanked the interpreter, telling him how happy I was that he had understood and relayed my jokes so well, since I heard such a great response. To my utter chagrin he replied, with a look of disdain, "They were laughing at *my* jokes, not yours."

PETER RICH & ZINGO
BOY FROM OUTER SPACE

Of course, their culture and language were so different, while verbal humor is so language specific, that it was a rude awakening to me. It is far worse than having to explain a joke that doesn't go over. One thing became quite clear. Though language may be a barrier, the art itself is not confined by boundaries. One can find it almost anywhere. Perhaps one day it will be performed on the moon, or even Mars, or some other planet, if it is not already. As of now, on stages the world over, clever and original entertainment is the goal; no matter what their longitude or latitude, it is their attitude. Some ventriloquists take the attitude of gratitude, giving thanks for each of their blessings and sharing their faith. They, too, can be found in many lands and are known as Gospel Ventriloquists.

Part Three

Gospel Ventriloquism

or

Dummies for Jesus

It is Sunday morning and the Baptist Church is filled to capacity. The service ends and the minister prepares to deliver the sermon. Looking out at all the eager, smiling faces, a smile is returned. One hand places the Bible, from which will be quoted chapter and verse, on the lectern, the other hand places upon a stand, of all things, a ventriloquist's doll, proudly wearing a very large button which proclaims, "Dummies for Jesus." These plain or decorative buttons are popular items sold among the brethren, through the mail and at retreats and conferences. The rustling and murmuring subside as "shushing" is replaced by a rapt silence. The minister turns and asks his small companion:

"Johnny, how are you getting along in Bible class?"

Johnny replies, "Well, I missed three days and the teacher sent me a thank you note." The audience chuckles.

"A thank you note? What happened?"

Johnny answers sincerely, "The reverend visited our class and asked me, 'What do you have to do to get to heaven?' and I said, 'first you gotta die." The audience roars.

The minister explains, "I think he wanted you to say, "Follow the Lord."

"No way! I would get in REALLY BIG trouble if I did that!"

The puzzled minister asks, "Why would you get in trouble in Bible class for following the Lord?"

"Cause my Bible class teacher told me that when we line up to go to lunch, I'm supposed to follow Danny in front of me." The audience laughs again.

The two continue weaving together humor and Bible teaching, until the collection plate is passed, whereupon Johnny exhorts the congregation, "If you wanna get to heaven, FILL 'ER UP!"

Variations of this scenario can be found in thousands of churches all over America, and even the world. Gospel ventriloquism, an inspired fusion of religion and entertainment, is exactly what the name implies — the presentation of Biblical stories and moral lessons through the use of a dummy and ventriloquial skills.

The age-old problem of trying to attract an audience, and then keeping it alert throughout a whole sermon, lecture or sales pitch has, for many centuries, beleaguered preachers, teachers, showmen, pitchmen and lecturers. Some form of entertainment, as a lure, is an antique tactic for gathering and holding crowds, harking back to the early days of revival meetings, medicine shows, and political rallies.

Medicine show, Tennessee, ca. 1935. In this backstage view a boy eyes figure as minstrel performer eyes photographer. (unknown) (Library of Congress)

Ventriloquism is quite popular among many of today's clergy, who are aware of their congregation's bombardment by current sales techniques, and realize that to compete successfully they must utilize some modern means to achieve spiritual ends. However, some sects still frown upon anything that smacks of the occult, or view the dummy as an idol. Those that appreciate it as an art, rather than the work of the devil, apply it in a space-age version of the Mary Poppins principle: "A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down." Thus, many ministers have fortified their inventory of teaching aids by learning to juggle, do mime, magic, play musical instruments, and act as clowns. Ministers and affiliated church members who have also added ventriloquism to their repertoire have only praise for it and strongly advise, "Use something visual. Get a puppet or dummy. It will keep the audience with you." Though it has visual aspects, ventriloquism is primarily verbal. This makes it an ideal method to include light or heavy heavenly humor in the lessons and/or sermons to spread the Word, hold attention, amuse, and instruct at the same time. They consider their work to be one more valuable and vital way to deliver the Christian message, taking their skills and their calling to churches, faith rallies, retreats, Bible classes and camps, hospitals and nursing homes. The wide appeal and versatility of Gospel ventriloquism, often called Victory or Victorious ventriloquism (victory over Satan and sin), helped it to spread beyond expectations.Such Victory ventriloquists now share their ideas among the more than four thousand ministries of this type around the United States. They meet at conventions and festivals where, in addition to sharing fellowship, they share ideas through workshops. These topics include: presenting their message, developing dialogues and dealing with the occasional objections of those who do not feel it is appropriate to use a dummy to help deliver "the word." The point that comes across is that the medium is not the message. For example, in an article in *NewsyVents*, the official publication of the North American Association of Ventriloquists, (NAAV), Evangelist Betty Pelcher described the dummy as "a channel between the ventriloquist and God." She noted that, "One strict lady thought my puppets were wrong to use in Churches. She said they were idols. I had to explain that an idol is worshiped. My puppets aren't worshiped; they are merely tools to get out God's message."

The reasoning behind these theatrics derives from St. Paul's message to the Corinthians: "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise." To become "fools for Christ's sake" because God has made "foolish the wisdom of the world."

Therefore, utilizing the "clown device" is not new. Its origins go back to medieval times when the clergy used similar practices to illustrate Biblical subjects, and are not far removed from Christmas Pageants. Today's gospel ventriloquism ***is*** relatively new, compared to the long-standing tradition of the clergy/clowns, morality plays and religious puppet shows (see sidebar) of which it is now considered merely another novel extension.

Puppets have a long connection to religion. The word "marionette" for a jointed puppet manipulated from above by strings or wires attached to its limbs is derived from the French marionnette, (little Mary), from Old French, the Virgin Mary, from diminutive of Marie, Mary (influenced by the name Marion) from Late Latin Maria, from Greek, from Hebrew Mirym.

So, even though the religious ban on witches, whisperers, necromancers and idol worshipers long forbade the use of ventriloquism, or its subtle ruses, in church activities, the focus is on entertainment to get the message across. That interdiction, in conjunction with the superstition, ignorance and secrecy surrounding the art contributed to its long prohibition for religious purposes.

Times have changed, indeed. Just ask Clinton Detweiler, one of the most influential and popular people behind the scenes. Detweiler, president of the North American Association of Ventriloquists, reports that the more than 3,500 current members in this organization are actively involved in some form of gospel ventriloquism. Japan alone has some 1,500 participants.

Detweiler is also co-director of the Maher Ventriloquist Studio in Littleton, Colorado. This family-owned business (his wife Adelia and their children work with him) is a one-stop depot for all things ventriloquial. The studio, started in 1934 by Fred Maher,[47] supplies the trade with custom-built and stock figures and conducts a hugely successful home study course for aspiring ventriloquists. A star graduate of the Maher Correspondence School, who began at age nine, is Willie Tyler. Now performing in nightclubs and on television with his sassy dummy, he has achieved national recognition as the team of Willie Tyler and Lester.

Although no longer active in this field as a performer, Detweiler shares his expertise. As a prolific author and publisher of books and scripts on the subject, he offers information on performing "do's and don'ts." His religious material contains Biblical stories and moral tales written in conversational style for use with a dummy or puppet. Among them are the classic stories of Jonah and the Whale, David and Goliath, and Daniel in the Lion's Den. Detweiler, a devout born-again Christian, is sensitive to the specialized needs and tastes of the evangelical audience. The material is humorous at times, but that is considered of secondary importance.

Of course, the dummy is popular with all ages, but it is an especially "open sesame" key to the children. While grownups with messages may seem overwhelming, or worse, boring, to children, there is nothing intimidating about the childlike vent figure with the wide grin. It is their surrogate standing in for them,

sometimes even asking questions they have on their mind, and appears almost real. As a rule the vent figures, whether boys or girls, are outspoken, disarming and playful, teasing the ventriloquist a bit along the way. Using the question and answer format, sometimes taking turns with the questions and answers, depending on the points and preferences it is really a form of the ages-old Socratic method. In this way the gospel ventriloquists with their sidekicks help get to the meaning of their serious lessons. Adding a touch of humor helps to brighten and lighten them, according to taste. Audience members, young and old alike, learn, or are reminded of, Christian and moral values while happily "eavesdropping" on the routines. Perhaps the Biblical injunction, "A little child shall lead them," applies here to a little dummy too.

The dummy, however, is only one part of the team. The majority of these practitioners consider themselves to be missionaries who have chosen the medium of ventriloquism for the delivery of the religious message. They are sincere, dedicated in their beliefs, and adhere exclusively to their calling. They get help from various sources, including Dale and Liz VonSeggen who founded One Way Street in 1974 as the family ministry. It is an inter-denominational multi-discipline children's ministry resource, publisher and supplier. They specialize in equipping and training children's workers, teachers and ministers to spread the Gospel by providing quality, fundamental Christian resources, puppets etc. Among the festivals they host, where ideas are shared in lectures, shows and camaraderie is the I-Fest — International Festival of Christian Puppetry and Ventriloquism

"Evangeloquists" have developed unique approaches, for example:

Terry Horn, a children's evangelist from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, personifies "Uncle Sam," attired in a red, white and blue striped costume. The Reverend John McPherson, proud of his American Indian heritage, bases his performance on it. Outfitted in authentic Cherokee garments he is accompanied by his puppet papooses "Linda" and "Kalijah." Together they conduct a fascinating gospel service called "Indian Pow Wow," which includes pointers on good citizenship as well as Bible lessons. This is not meant to be an accurate rendition of an actual Native American ceremony, which will be described later.

In Seattle, Washington, Salvation Army Captain Dolores Williamson appears with her wooden companion Chester. Both wear the familiar blue Salvation Army uniform when they hold their temperance lectures at rehabilitation centers and soup kitchens. During the Christmas season, cheerful Chester, thinly disguised as Santa Claus, encourages contributions to the familiar kettle by bidding passersby to, "Spread good cheer, drop your coins right here. Merry-Christmas."

Dolores Williamson with Chester, in Santa suit

At one time, Sister Cabrini, a nun from St. Paul, Minnesota, dressed in the modern version of the classical habit when she performed for church groups and hospital patients. Calling her program "Songs of Love," she and her dummy partner presented comedy, magic and, of course, songs, to cheer others.

The gospel ventriloquist with the most startling theatrical approach is the Reverend Von R. Saum, who assumes the role of Captain Hook! Saum, an ex-member of a tough Hell's Angels motorcycle gang, lost his left arm and leg in an accident. The experience was so shattering that he turned to religion, becoming a born-again Christian. He entered the Southern Bible College in Houston, Texas and emerged an ordained minister. A large, imposing man weighing more than three hundred pounds, Saum appears in colorful pirate garb with a gleaming metal hook at the end of his left arm. Using this great hook for holding childrens' attention, he preaches and teaches fundamental Christianity, along with entertainment supplied by what he lovingly calls his "crew," a dummy named Sharkey and a talking parrot.

Another noted clerical ventriloquist first attained fame outside of the gospel realm. In a beauty pageant, in front of millions of viewers, Vonda Kay Van Dyke showed off both her figures; her own attractive one as well as her wisecracking wooden one, Curly. Those, along with a charming personality and considerable talents, helped her win the coveted title of "Miss America." However, she turned her back on a nightclub career, having found her calling in the ministry, getting laughs while giving her message at rallies and fund-raising benefits across the country.

As in the secular domain of dummies with name recognition, such as Charlie McCarthy, Danny O'Day, and Jerry Mahoney, there are celebrity dummies within the gospel sphere. These mini-ministers have brought renown to their manipulators by spreading the word in their own distinctive fashion. Two such prominent figures are, "Clyde Hyde," the sidekick of Dr. Al Lacey and "Wally Wood," the familiar pal of Pastor Paul Everett. A graduate of Western Baptist College, Everett, a full-time gospel ventriloquist since 1970, is a charismatic teacher, lecturer, and author. He appears at summer camps, youth rallies and school assemblies in Salem, Oregon, presenting a service which is inspirational as well as fun-loving.

Combining inspiration and entertainment is a long tradition among Native Americans. In *The Native Americans*, Robert Spencer, Professor of Anthropology, University of Minnesota, at Minneapolis indicates, quite clearly, that the religious ceremonies, which featured ventriloquism, had important entertainment value too.[48]

> But shamanistic séances were held without regard to illness. Curing, the spiritual battles in which *shamans* engaged, ...the shamanistic performance involving legerdemain, ventriloquism and trickery, had an exciting effect. Religion, like any form of recreation, had its value in ...relieving tedium and in *providing an out from boredom.*" (Emphasis and punctuation added)[49]

This view is further supported, and dramatically demonstrated, by an anecdote about an Indian *séance*, from another writer, about her co-editor, Eleanor Burke Leacock.[50] Because her research indicated that this ceremony was abandoned more than three hundred-fifty years before, she was even more surprised.

> In the shaking tent rite of the Montagnais-Naskapi an older man (occasionally it used to be a woman) discourses in the dark with supernaturals while his audience sits quietly around him in a specially constructed lodge. Although the rite was optimistically reported by a Jesuit missionary to have disappeared in the seventeenth century, in 1951 Leacock lay in her shelter listening to Indians leaving the shaking tent. Hearing them murmur and laugh about what the various gods had said (Djokobish had been very witty that evening), it struck her how similar they sounded to the people coming out of a rural theater and repeating the interesting and enjoyable parts of the film they had just seen.

Or perhaps, the situation was similar to audiences repeating the jokes after a ventriloquial variety show, or gospel presentation. Thus, in ceremonies similar to those of the ancient oracles, the *shaman*/showman/medicine man/woman would ask the spirits questions and the spirits, in "thrown" or distant voices, would reply wisely, or perhaps, even humorously. These scenes were presented without dummies. While not gospel ventriloquism, the religious and entertainment qualities are clear. The rite continued for many more years than expected because it filled many needs.

In practically all societies there was almost always someone, a man or woman, called enchanter, *kahuna*, magician, medicine man/woman, psychic, sorcerer/ess, witch, witch doctor, wizard, yogi, *yogini*, medium, seer and other names. Their combination of showmanship, spiritual renewal, and herbal knowledge did serve an important purpose for the health and well-being of their community. Approximately half of our drugs today originally came from chemicals in plants and trees, which were then synthesized. For example, aspirin is from the bark of the willow tree, taxol is from the pine tree. Even today, scientists are studying what the *shaman* of the rainforests use, in order to discover new cures among the plants and trees there. Deep ocean exploration is searching for cures under the seas, as well. As in any society, only when power or prestige (prestige comes from the French "illusion" or "trick") is used against the people, does it become harmful.

The community of gospel ventriloquists is proud of a devoted member in Japan. Reverend Ichiro Noda is considered to be the "father" of modern ventriloquism in his country. He, and his dummy Ken-Chan, are the Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy of the Orient. Noda began as a professional "rakugoka" or comedy storyteller until he saw Edgar Bergen in a movie, and watched him over and over because he was so inspired to learn ventriloquism. Converting to Christianity after attending an evangelical meeting conducted by the famed Toyohiko Kagawa, he entered the Theological Seminary and was ordained a minister. He served at the Shinmaruko Church (the United Church of Christ in Japan). Noda became a television personality in Tokyo for more than thirty years, performing under the name of Ichiro Harukaze, whose well-publicized motto is "Christ saved me from my sins and ventriloquism changed my life." His fame as a ventriloquist and pastor resulted in numerous

requests to teach the art, which led to organizing the Logos Ventriloquist Study Club, on November 11, 1967. The club publishes an annual yearbook, which is similar to a typical high school or college graduation yearbook. It contains photographs of members of the graduating class, with page after page showing men and women of all ages proudly holding their own dummy.

One of Noda's outstanding pupils, Megumi Takahashi, gives a thirty-minute program in which she plays the role of Mary of Magdalene. Megumi's purpose is to spread the Word of God, Jesus and his teachings. Her presentation is an enactment of the seven demons which plague Mary, and Jesus' intervention in curing Mary of this affliction. The dummy, Taka-Chan questions the words and meanings of this serious lesson, helping to focus on the essence of the message. While not really a comedy routine, the ventriloquism enables Megumi to play two roles in her mini-drama.

Megumi and Taka-Chan

Megumi and Clinton Detweiler emphasize that gospel ventriloquism uses a specialized type of comedy timing where the punch line is not the primary goal. Evangelist, Gospel Ventriloquist Marge Schmidt agrees. In an article originally printed in NewsyVents, the newsletter of the NAAV, she stated:

> The Gospel routine should be entertaining as well as educational and it should contain some humor. Gospel routines should not be slapstic [*sic*] or so very funny that the lesson is lost. The secular ventriloquist saves his best laughs for the end of the script. This can be done by the Gospel vent also but it is not always best. If you have set a mood with your dialogue and made a point that you want your audience to continue thinking on after you're finished, a laugh at the end might destroy what you've done.

Doug Nearpass is a ventriloquist/puppeteer and gospel performer who deftly combines the message and humor. His puppet, Dig-Dag, also sings while Nearpass plays the piano with his other hand. He travels here and abroad training others to spread the word.

The art of ventriloquism straddles the past and present. It is an ancient, secret technique which lives on in nearly its original form, but now openly. From an object of contempt in biblical times, to its contemporary use in church services around the world, it proclaims its timeless power to attract a crowd and hold its attention.

Some ventriloquists use their art to help others in different, secular ways. Sometimes they work so quietly that we don't hear about it in the media, sometimes they are spotlighted for their unusual contributions to their community, and sometimes strange things happen in the course of what starts out as an "ordinary" or "typical" performance. Plus, there are tid-bits that don't quite fit anywhere else but...

Part Four
Arti-facts

The art has had, still has, and will probably always have performers who are amusing and different. As in all areas, there have been the famous and infamous, the innovators and imitators, and others, usually lesser known and last on the list. They are the often unsung, offstage, heroes and heroines.

The unique qualities of ventriloquism, and the people who practice it, have risen to the call in some very interesting situations. For instance, there was the plight of Elise, the daughter of my friend, Tad Ware. While climbing a tree, she fell and fractured her arm. At the hospital she was surrounded by doctors and nurses who questioned and poked at her endlessly. In pain, frightened and frustrated by all these strange adults, she suddenly stopped speaking. Her father was trying to soothe her, to help get her to communicate. Then he remembered a vent doll he had used to amuse her, some time ago. He brought the dummy to the hospital. As the figure began to talk and express concern, the child responded to her little friend, the contemporary who seemed to be on her side.

Dr. Susan Linn is a versatile and talented performer who could be in several chapters. In the 1970s, She appeared as a special guest on the PBS program *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, which gave her the national recognition she deserved. Her field of expertise is psychology and Boston Children's Hospital was fortunate to have her unique combination of puppet therapy and ventriloquism, with her familiar friends, the popular handcrafted puppets, “Audrey Duck” and “Cat-A-Lion.” Fortunately for us, her skills have spread beyond Boston, via lectures around the world on the use of puppets as therapeutic tools. In addition, she has been featured in several video series which help children who are facing serious life crises and situations including death and loss, chronic illness and even abuse.

She created, wrote and performed in *Different and The Same: Helping Children Identify and Prevent Prejudice* (Family Communications, Inc., Pittsburgh), an award-winning video series for schools. The *Boston Parents' Paper* gave her their “Performer of the Year Award” which attests to the unique, warm and funny live performances she and her partners provide. The prestigious puppetry organization, UNIMA [Union International de La Marrionette] gave her their Citation of Excellence which rounds out the rounds of applause, with plaudits from her peers.

Sam Caron of Sierra Vista, Arizona is a child psychologist who uses ventriloquism, magic, and balloon sculpting in his work with children. He produced a video to educate children and their families about Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) — the first of his three part series on that topic. Other videos he has produced include child abuse, molestation, don't talk to strangers, AIDS, etc. which have run frequently on TV in the Tucson area.

Jake Sills, a psychologist who teaches at Harvard, is also a ventriloquist. He performs regularly at schools in the Boston area, and he, like Vernon years before him, is blind. Robert "Jake" Sills was inspired to learn ventriloquism from watching television in the fifties and sixties. At age 11, while living in Northern New York, he learned ventriloquism from Paul Winchell's book, *Ventriloquism for Fun and Profit*. His first Figure was a toy Jerry Mahoney made by the Juro Toy Company. Throughout his teens, he and his partner, Terry O'Connor, entertained his family, friends, and community. At the age of 20, he lost his eyesight in a car accident. At that time, "Terry O'Connor was retired to the attic." Jake went on to college to earn a graduate degree in clinical psychology. He is currently a practicing psychotherapist, and Clinical Lecturer at Harvard University. However, he found the art of ventriloquism impossible to abandon. Jake dusted off his old figures and has successfully integrated ventriloquism into his therapy and teaching. He blends the use of the near and distant voices with humor and magic, creatively integrating his vision loss into the act. Jake is currently a semiprofessional ventriloquist, performing for schools, colleges, fund raisers, and coffee houses throughout the New England area.

In Japan, Reverend Noda's remarkable work with autistic children has been noted by doctors there.

Though Judge Alan Farber, of Kentucky, became paralyzed in an accident and was confined to a motorized wheelchair, he still gave out sentences — both judicially and ventriloquially. While on the bench and presiding as a judge he was serious, but in his spare time he used his hobby to help rehabilitate youthful offenders who ran afoul of the law. With his mechanized ventriloquial figure he created a dialogue in which the troubled youth apparently did not feel threatened. They related well to the dummy. The compassion and counsel which appeared to come from it, rather than an adult, freed them to discuss their problems. He has since retired from the bench, but remains active in ventriloquism.

In the last years of the 1990s, *The New York Times*, among other newspapers, reported that, along with school vouchers, sales taxes and city charter revisions, voters in San Francisco decided whether or not a veteran police officer could continue to patrol his beat with a ventriloquist's dummy. After he was selected to work in a community policing program that encouraged officers to use "Creative and ingenious methods to break down barriers between citizens and police," Officer Bob Geary picked his new partner, Brendan O'Smarty, out of a catalogue for ventriloquists. Officer O'Smarty's uniform is, of course, a perfect replica of Officer Geary's down to the piping on the pants and the woven leather holster.

Combined with the extensive experience of the 53-year-old officer, who has an undergraduate degree in art, a master's degree in education and four Medals of Valor, the dummy's silly wooden face made lost children giggle, quieted domestic disputes and encouraged homeless people to move from doorways.

The successful team of Bob Geary and Brendan O'Smarty worked smoothly and effectively together, until a series of high-level changes took place in the police department. When a new chief took over, Officer Geary was told that the dummy was okay at youth and community events, but not on patrol. On the beat he would now need written permission each time he wanted to take Brendan out of the trunk. "How ridiculous," Officer Geary said, "that a cop is trusted to decide when to use his gun but not his dummy." The voters agreed!

Ed Wynn, out front. The author is hidden behind the dummy and seat.

While ventriloquism rarely shows up as the theatrical event it once was, it is still seen in some forms on stage, both on and off Broadway, and on tour.

In the 1940 Broadway play *Boys and Girls Together* this author did the manipulation and voice for the figure behind the scenes, making Ed Wynn look like a great ventriloquist out front. All he needed to do was keep his arm out of the way.

In the late 1970s what was promoted as "A New Musical Comedy" was presented at the Quaigh Theatre. It was written by Eddie Garson who, as an accomplished ventriloquist, also starred in the play as Jackie Jordan. The title? *The Ventriloquist*.

Señor Wences, and later, Ronn Lucas, played on Broadway in *Sugar Babies*. It was this role that fully launched the talented Lucas.

Charles Ludlam, the late writer/director/performer not the writer of novels, wrote, produced, directed, and starred in *The Ventriloquist's Wife*, for his Ridiculous Theatrical Company. His insulting partner, Walter Ego, has a life of his own, and it includes trying to take the wife away from the star. The wife, and co-star, is Black-eyed Susan who receives an obscene phone call from Walter, which also gives her a chance to perform ventriloquy — the telephone voice, in this oddly engaging, adults-only play, of 1978.

Nunsense, a successful off-Broadway and touring play, had a female actor, tutored by Todd Stockman, perform ventriloquism that was legitimate. *Chicago* (ca. 1998) had one which was not. *A New Brain*, (William Finn wrote the music and lyrics) a 1998 musical about a songwriter's precipitous and life-threatening encounter with illness, had a throwaway non sequitur vent bit.

Those performances were public and some were not flattering to the art, which has been an age old problem. Of course ventriloquism was more than a "throwaway" or spoof. It was a profession for some, and a hobby for others. But it also served uniquely as a relief of tedium for those who served in the armed forces, especially for the wounded or captured. As mentioned, Ron Blaskett performed when he was in the

Australian army, and there were many others of whom we do not know, but here are some who have come to our attention and deserve mention.

This is a very interesting article from *The Grapevine News*, newsletter of the long defunct International Brotherhood of Ventriloquists, in April 1942 p. 7 (Emphasis original, some minor typos corrected, after all, it was typed directly on a mimeograph stencil by someone volunteering their time).

Freddie Woods, now a member of the IBV, is in the RECEIVING HOSPITAL in Detroit, Mich. with Infantile Paralysis, [Polio] has been there five months and we only recently heard of him. For pass time and to earn a little money for necessities he makes little miniature dummies that you can pin on your lapel and work the mouth from your coat pocket. the picture is copied from his drawing and is the exact size of the dummies about 1½ inches high, head & shoulders only, side view of either an Army Officer or a Sailor, appropriately painted, is $1.00 Or he will make a front view for 1.50. Freddie is just 21 years old and he has been working vent since he was 14.

Both T. Sgt. Mahlon R. Friot and his pal Willie Wilson were stationed in Italy. Their specially printed and hand pasted picture graced the cover of the *Grapevine News* of August 1944, accompanied by an article inside, which explains that his exact location is secret.

Australian War Memorial
Neg.# 116036

Through George Schindler, who travels extensively lecturing and in his various elected capacities in professional organizations, we get another war story. He relates that during World War II an Australian soldier, in an effort to while away the tedium of incarceration in a prisoner-of-war camp, fashioned a life-sized dummy out of cast-off clothing, scraps of straw and mud. When completed, the prisoner's creation was sassy and mocked the guards. Since the dummy was the culprit, the prisoner escaped blame and, fortunately, was not punished for the dummy's apparent impudence. The Australian War Memorial provided this caption.

Singapore. Sept. 13, 1945. Prisoners of war released from Changi prison camp were evacuated from Singapore by the Australian hospital ship Manunda, the first Australian ship to arrive at Singapore after the surrender of the Japanese. Shown, Gunner T. Hussey, 2/10 Field Regiment waiting on a stretcher to board the Manunda. His ventriloquist doll "Joey" is the last of three he made while in Changi camp. Photographer: not known.

It is not unusual for the audience, whether guards, passersby, or customers in a nightclub, to accept the dummy as an entity capable of thought and speech on its own. Some are assisted by alcohol, some by an active imagination and all by the clever performance of the illusion called ventriloquism., however, there can also be unexpected consequences. Several years ago, I appeared in a nightclub in Bermuda with my partner Bruce. At the conclusion of our routine Bruce would be placed into a suitcase, as he protested loudly and long at being put away. This was much before the public turned its attention to child abuse. At one performance a lady in the audience stood up and shouted at me, "Leave that boy alone!" At that point, Bruce, suitcase, and I made a hasty retreat. The following anecdotes show how some members of the profession, while not of the hero variety, have suffered for their art.

A street performer is often known as a "busker," a word that, oddly enough, most dictionaries do not recognize, even though it has been around for centuries. They attract crowds with their "partners" and routines. If someone comes by and likes what they see and hear, they will stay, if not, they are free to go. At the conclusion of each performance, which lasts about ten to fifteen minutes, the performers "pass the hat." Based on the unwritten rule of, "if you stay, you pay," those who do well entertaining can do well financially at the end of the day, depending upon the town. Some places, like Paris, France discourage busking. David Strassman busked in many countries, and was treated with appreciation in some and hostility in others, though he started in America. His partner Chuck Wood's acerbic sense of humor developed in the attempt to attract and hold the attention of late night strollers in Greenwich Village and environs. Years ago, another such performer, Otto Pederson, pushed to the limits of the theory that, if you don't like a street performer, you don't have to pay and you can simply walk away. He made George, his partner, quite abrasive and offensive. Occasionally they ran into trouble. One onlooker, offended by the seemingly insulting and insinuating remarks, hauled off and hit George, the dummy and apparent source of the rudeness, breaking its jaw. Lucky for Otto! Even though the incident put him out of business for a while it didn't put him in the hospital. Others occasionally report similar incidents.

Not all hostile acts are perpetrated by adults. Children can also harbor aggressive tendencies, though they are usually quite friendly. However, rather than dissipating whatever innate aggressiveness they may have, it is encouraged by the constant exposure to aggression portrayed in the media. Because it is exhibited by both the "good guys" and the "bad guys" kids often find it difficult to discriminate between what is appropriate and what is not. Thus, they can be surprisingly and inexplicably antagonistic, lashing out at a figure or puppet for no apparent reason. Some veteran ventriloquists often do not let children come close and touch their partners, others do. However, children can be smiling and hit without warning, to vent their aggression when even the best vent is unprepared. One can sometimes be blind sided because it is hard to know what signs to keep an eye out for. Here, on the on the other hand, are some tips, things and folks that are fun to "Keep an Eye Out For..."

Part Five

P.S. Keep an Eye Out For...

P.S. Keep an eye out for...

...memorabilia relating to ventriloquists. It's fun to collect, and who knows, in 60 odd years or so you too might have amassed enough for your own presentation. Also, keep an eye out for...

...Shows, some old pros, old ideas and old standbys in new clothing; new faces, new ideas and contemporary greats, such as...

...Ronn Lucas, who works with Scorch Dragon, and a soft puppet named Buffalo Billy, does an auctioneer's chant whose speed and intensity increases as he sings along. He has many clever ideas and is technically superb. He has performed for Queen Elizabeth II, Presidents George Bush, Ronald Reagan, and Bill Clinton, as well as Princess Margaret and Prince Khalid of Saudi Arabia. The comedy is original and memorable. The quality of his act goes without saying — well, actually almost everything in his act says something.

...Jeff Dunham and odd pals, including his grouchy old man character. Based on a real person from his hometown, Waco Texas, (by the way, it's the same as Ronn Lucas's, and where the Dr. Pepper soft drink was invented in 1885.) Walter, arms crossed, brows furrowed, provides real laughs. He has worked in commercials too. Other characters in his fast-paced act include, most notably, a Jalapeno on a stick, and a worm in a drink. He is the first ventriloquist to be given "Best Male Stand Up Comedian Award" on the American Comedy Awards. That can only help the art.

....David Erskine, an eclectic ventriloquial performer, historian, collector, author, coach, as well as student of creativity and comedy. He has contributed to the art he loves by compiling, among many things "A Collector's Dream, The Great Lester on Tape," and oral histories of ventriloquists.

...Dan Horn, a nice guy on and off the stage who has a knack for comedy. One of his most popular characters is Orson, an elderly vaudevillian with a wry sense of humor who comes to life with Dan's expert manipulation — and since no one likes to be manipulated, it leads to some great comedy. Orson also does some ventriloquism with Little Gary, his wooden-head dummy. No matter who shares the stage with him, all of Dan's clever and jovial presentations captivate everyone.

...Judy Buch of Tolland, Connecticut, who is a multi-talented ventriloquist and keynote speaker. She developed her ability to get people to think, from her background in education. She uses analogies, insights and ventriloquial vignettes to demonstrate her key points. Her attitude-based programs are tailored for each organization whether it's for adults in business or children in school.

For example, she demonstrates common behavior strategies in workplace settings using her vent figures. Audience members easily recognize themselves or others in those roles which are exaggerated for clarity and humor. Her client list includes such top, and diverse, organizations like Raytheon, Texas Instruments, Corning and ABB Combustion Engineering.

For students a similar format is used at their level of understanding. Judy uses audience participation in her presentations including audience volunteers. The presentations contain a pertinent message, which gets her hired, softened with the humor of ventriloquism and her own warm charm, which gets her invited back. Whether the focus is on the human side of change, cultivating character, leadership issues, diversity or conflict resolution, Judy Buch makes a difference combining a message with laughs.

Judy is the 1996 Vent Haven "Ventriloquist of the Year," and the '98-'99 President of an award-winning chapter of the National Speakers Association. She's been seen on *Good Morning America*, pictured in the *Smithsonian Magazin*e, and featured in the *New York Times*. Keep an eye out for her as she raises the art of ventriloquism to new heights.

...Carla Rhodes who leans toward stand-up comedy along with skilled ventriloquism and clever humor. While only in high school, she is getting noticed and notice, showing signs of success, much like her mentor and friend, Shari Lewis.

...Doug Skinner who still looks like he just came out of the '50s. His ventriloquial presentations are unusual in that he even gets the punch lines. An actor, writer, musician, cartoonist and member of the comedy troupe "White Knuckle Sandwich," he shows up in many likely and unlikely venues. His loyal fans know to expect that you never quite know just what to expect.

...Lynn Trefzger who writes her own captivating comedy acts which delight young and old throughout the country, featuring audience interaction, and quick wit. Amazing audiences since 1977, she adds to the fun by customizing it for the group.

It is often recommended that being a good mimic is required to be a good ventriloquist. Two fellows are tops in this area. Keep an eye (and ear) out for...

...Bob Rumba who is beyond off-beat. He is a talented comic, mimic and ventriloquist, who delights is pushing the envelope of decorum. To him, nothing is sacred. If that is your style, watch out for him, and don't heckle.

...Pete Michaels, who is a crowd. As an accomplished singer, he has some of his figures present songs in the styles of numerous performers and he imitates cartoon characters. He makes commercials and TV appearances. His instructional videotape, called *Video Ventriloquism,* was the first of its kind to help beginners begin.

...Joel Leder who splits his time between acting, building figures, writing books for those who want to make their own figures, and performing. In one of his side-splitting acts he saws his dummy in half, lengthwise — with a surprise ending. Sshh.. Don't tell anyone the ending..

...One secret which is not well kept, but just in case you were not aware, keep an ear out for the distinctive timbre of Paul Winchell's voice, which is well recognized around the world. He created the voice of "Tigger" in Disney's "Winnie The Pooh" motion pictures and TV series. In 1974, he won the very prestigious Grammy Award for the best recording for children as "Tigger" in *Winnie The Pooh And Tigger Too*. The song was called *The Wonderful Thing About Tiggers*. Winchell coined the phrase "TTFN" Tah Tah For Now! As Dick Dastardly in *The Wacky Races* which went on to become *Fender Benders*, Fleagle in the *Banana Splits*, Gargamel on *The Smurfs*, Zummi Gummi and Grammi Gummi in a Disney series titled *The Gummi Bears,* he and his characterizations gained new fans. He wrote a book and produced a video. The video, *How to Become a Ventriloquist*, covers speaking without moving your lips while saying the difficult letters. He compresses over fifty fabulous years in the business into sixty spectacular minutes.

...Bob Ladd, Elvira and *Dialogue,* the magazine of the Vent World Association. Bob is a part-time professional vent, and he has been this quarterly's Editor/Publisher over the last dozen years or so. He ceased publication to take a well deserved break, because he has been at it longer than that. Bob performs with Elvira Nosegay, who seems to have a comment about everything, including this blurb. Right, Elvira?

...Nacho Estrada — especially if you get feedback from your P.A. system but it all seems okay. You can twiddle the dials, pull the plug, pull your hair, but this 1996 "Ventriloquist of the Year," the undisputed master of phony feedback, and an expert on distant voice, will drive you mad. Nacho stop it!

...Jim Barber, who deserves another mention here. In 1989, the National Association of Campus Activities named him "Campus Comedy Entertainer of the Year" and in 1986, he was named "The Funniest Person in Tennessee" by Showtime/The Movie Channel. These are only a few of his well deserved honors.

...Kenn Crawford, the owner of VENTmail - the Ventriloquism Mailing List. He Through modern modem technology, and email, it lets people around the world "talk" to each other and share their interest in ventriloquism.

...The ventriloquist directory which is distributed to the members of the list and compiled by Carol Greene, of Los Gatos, California. For thirty-three years she was known throughout Moreland School District, San Jose, California for her many workshops for teachers and children and use of ventriloquism and puppetry in the classroom. Her current stage performances are highlighted by music in each puppet's act. She sings with some, dances with others and interacts with the crowd when possible. She has composed songs, designed and constructed some musical instruments and created some full-body puppets. As a columnist for Laugh*Maker's Variety Arts Magazine, for many years, she has generously shared her expertise.

...Johnny Main, TV personality, who, since 1975, has used several of his own creations. His first professional figure, “Archie,” was carved by Frank Marshall. Main was voted “Ventriloquist of the Year” at the 1981 Vent Haven Convention.

...Anthony Cooper from Brooklyn, New York, who took second place at the Twenty-Second Annual Ventriloquist ConVENTion, with his wisecracking crony “Clarence.” This twelve-year-old ventriloquist went on to win the Apollo Theater Children's Talent Competition, and in December of 1998, appeared at the Children's Museum of Manhattan. He also writes and is studying acting at one of New York's foremost performing arts schools. He has been featured in the *Afro Times*, while the *Brooklyn Record* called him “a ventriloquist par excellence.” Though not related to John Cooper, he follows in his footsteps by garnering positive press for our ventriloquial community. He is seen above in a picture taken by fellow ventriloquist, Chilly Willie, at the Brooklyn Museum, at an exhibit of entertainment history. Anthony is standing with John Cooper’s daughter, Joan Maynard, and the author, in front of John Cooper’s crony, Sam, who is holding court in a place of honor on permanent display there.

...*On The Other Hand*, a documentary filmed in part at the 1998 Vegas Ventriloquist Convention.

Spencer Horsman & Dexter

...Spencer Horsman, the son of Ken and Bernie Horsman of Baltimore, MD calls himself, “The Magical Ventriloquist.” He includes clever magic in his act with Dexter. They have been a team since 1994, though his first “Dexter” was by Jerry Layne and his current “Dexter” is by Tim Selberg. Spencer has been a busy fellow, already having done corporate work, as well as appearing in numerous national TV shows, commercials, movies, and on the stage. He is the first ventriloquist to appear on David Letterman’s TV show, where he was a big hit. You won’t have to keep an eye out for him — he’ll surely catch it.

...The very first rock song about ventriloquism. While others have merely mentioned the word in their songs, this is the first song about a ventriloquist and his show. You never can tell when or how the muse of music will send inspiration your way. This gem of a song, *Ventriloquism for the Total Dummy*, derives its inspiration from the 1987 book of the same name, by Dan Ritchard. The lyrics and music, as well as guitars, bass, vocals and mix are by the talented, masterful and multifaceted, Danny Parker, of Eastchester, New York.

Click to hear a sample

Clip Credit:
Recorded at: 80-20 Studios, Glendale, NY
Courtesy of:
Danny Parker
and
The Boys' Star Library

...Steven Connor's in-depth look at more aspects of the field than you can imagine, under the title: *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriiloquism*, was published by Oxford University Press.

...Charlie Tyson III Tomlinson, of Decatur, Alabama, who is currently researching and documenting Black Ventriloquists. He is working on a special book, *Colored, Negro, and Black, Shades of the African American Ventriloquist*. This volume will cover a group that has made many contributions to our art, and its popularity. In his research, he has discovered that there were three Black Ventriloquists who performed in mainstream Vaudeville, during the early 1900s. John W. Cooper performed his act, "Fun In A Barber Shop," at the Bijou Theatre, Brooklyn, New York in 1909, and toured the country as well. Frank Rogers performed with two dummies, one black, and one white, at the Hammerstein's Victoria Theater in April 1910. The dapper ventriloquist Johnnie Woods performed during the World War I years around 1917.

In addition, Tomlinson is collecting any memorabilia and paraphernalia related to Black Ventriloquists and will share photos of them in the book. Many have been generously donated to this worthy project, including ventriloquist comedy albums by Richard Sandfield, better known as Richard and Willie. He also has Sandfield's performance uniforms made by Ruth West, the designer for Michael Jackson, and the Jackson Five. Among other treasures to keep an eye out for are Willie Tyler's 1965 comedy album "Hello Dummy!" Joan Cooper Maynard, the daughter of the late John W. Cooper, has been encouraging and supporting this project, as are Willie Tyler and his mentor, Willie Brown, who started Tyler in the art. Leaving no stone unturned, he is steadfastly ferreting out as much information and as many photographs as he can, which will give all those deserving performers their due, and, at long last, fill us in on our long and, long lost, history.

...Professor John Hodgson's forthcoming tome: *An Other Voice: Ventriloquism and Romantic Self-Expression*, from which he has so generously shared excerpts. Though he is Dean of Studies at Princeton University, in his own way he is a ventriloquist. That is, by giving voice to our early American predecessors, whom he has taken to heart, he has given those early "professors" of the art a chance to speak to us today. He has searched here and abroad to find out all about them, making his book the place to look for the lost and profound. His extraordinarily thorough research will set the record straight once and for all, while his easy-to-read style will take you along on the travels and travails of these trailblazing troupers.

...*Mary Ellen Mark: 25 Years*. Bulfinch Press, 1991. An art photography book, with an unusual look at Edgar and Charlie, in 1978.

When ventriloquists chat among themselves it is much like any other conversation. When they talk *to* themselves, it is often just part of the job of talking to inanimate objects, which may include real humans, human characters, or imaginary ones. Then again, some talk to animals. In fact, animals themselves have been known to speak and even have been known to play the role of ventriloquist!

Part Six

Talk To The Animals

> *...Birds produce sound by ventriloquism. The sound box in birds is an enlargement of the trachea at the point where the windpipe divides into two bronchi. This organ is called the syrinx and is exclusive to birds...*[51]
>
> *There is some evidence that a high-pitched call, such as the seet alarm call of a robin, may do more than merely blur the location of the alarmist; it may disguise it in the manner of a ventriloquist.*[52]

The World's Oldest Con Game related that the ability to deceive the ear, by making sounds seem as though they are coming from other places, is found among animals and birds such as the mourning dove and the American chickadee. Even parakeets have been known to "speak." Usually the term speak, when applied to talking animals, means mimic. Most talking animals, actually birds, repeat what they have heard. Thus the term "to parrot" means to repeat without understanding and applies to schoolchildren who learn by rote, unthinking adults who perhaps "parrot the party line," as well as the parrots themselves.

Some birds which learn to imitate human speech **do** respond with the right word on cue. That is not anywhere near the level of a conversation, but it is still quite an accomplishment. Particularly adept are the mynah bird and the African grey parrot. While most parrots have long been associated with repeating, "Polly wanna cracker," there is one unusual fellow who literally speaks for himself. Although he has an amazing ability, we need to have a human tell his story.

> ...an African gray parrot named Alex, has been the subject of scientific training and study, learning to use his version of English words in what appears to be direct communication with his handlers. He can, says Irene Pepperberg of the University of Arizona, use English vocalizations to "request, refuse, identify, categorize, or quantify more than 50 items... He has acquired functional use of 'no' and phrases such as 'Come here,' 'I want X,' and 'wanna go Y' in order to influence (albeit to a limited extent) the behavior of his trainers and to alter his immediate environment. [53]

That "Learned Pigs" and other animals can pick up the most subtle and nearly undetectable (by human observers) cues from the performer, has been known for a long time and was discussed by Pinchbeck as far back as 1805.[54] Extensive testing under controlled conditions have ruled out the conscious or unconscious cuing of Alex, the subject, by his handlers.

While we know that birds have spoken for at least as long as man has been able to write, it is quite unusual to hear a mammal speak. Scientists tell us that the organs of mammals are not capable of speech. *Funk's Standard Dictionary*, 1895 mentions:

> Onappo (Brazil) a reddish-gray nyctipithecine monkey or teetee (Callithrix discolor). Called also ventriloquist-monkey.

Likewise, *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary* (1913):

> Onappo" n. (Zool.) A nocturnal South American monkey (Callithrix discolor), noted for its agility; — called also ventriloquist monkey [for its unusual screech.]

That's screech, not speech. Well maybe not, but there is a well-documented case in recent times of a mammal that surprised everyone. He was a harbor seal that harbored an unusual gift among mammals, the gift of mimicry. His is an odd story.

George and Alice Swallow of Cundy Harbor, Maine rescued an abandoned or orphaned pup seal that was found by George's brother Scotty. George pointed out that he never planned to teach the seal to speak, he just spoke to him, as many people do to animals, rather often. The pup was a runt and was slow to eat, but once he got started he vacuumed up fish, hence they named him Hoover, after the vacuum cleaner. After Hoover the pup was old enough, George let him out of the bathtub and took him to play in the pond by his house.

> When George came looking for him at the pond, Hoover hid among the cattails. "Hey, get outa thay-ah," George would shout in his gravelly voice, with intonations characteristic of some New England dialects.[55]

Hoover's feelings never seemed to be hurt when George called him to lunch or dinner with "Hey, stupid, get ovah heah."The general greeting was, "How ah yuh?"

Hoover became a community mascot. In less than two months after joining the Swallow household some rather ecstatic children told George that, "Hoover talks! He said 'Hello thay-ah!" George just accepted it as childish imagination.

That was before his own encounter along the little trail to the pond on which they both traveled often. As George approached the pond, he plainly heard the seal say, "Get outa thay-ah!" But this was patently absurd. Hoover grew too big to keep at home and too dependent to return to the "wild." Arrangements were made and they took him to the New England Aquarium in Boston. Parting was bittersweet sorrow.

Something quite strange occurred over the next several years. Instead of speaking less, as his old friend George was forgotten, Hoover began to grunt more and more. The handlers keep detailed records of the animals in their care, and they show that from 1974 until 1978 the pace of sounds increased until November 11, 1978, when the handler recorded this notation: "Says 'Hoover' in plain English — I have witnesses!"

For no apparent reason, and even though he was no longer in contact with his old friend George, Hoover's orations grew. Those old familiar phrases, "Hello thay-ah," "How ah yuh?" and "Get outa heah!"— in that same New England intonation, became more distinct and more common.

The Swallows eventually heard all about Hoover and had a delightful reunion with him. Even after five years he remembered them quite well. Of course, people have a tendency to talk too and his unique ability was not a secret easily kept.

Soon Hoover was a media star, and scientists from the Smithsonian Institution came to study his odd talent. But why he, alone among seals, imitates human speech is a mystery to the researchers.[56] And so it remains.

Anthropomorphism is a term that means attributing human motivation, characteristics, or behavior to inanimate objects, animals, or natural phenomena. From religion to storytelling, humans have been attracted to the idea that other things are humanlike. We even attribute gender and give names to cars and boats, for example. There is such a fascination with the subject that it is little surprise to note that both real and imaginary animals that talk have been around for centuries, and we can only touch upon that phenomenon here. After the biblical story of Balaam's Ass,[57] some of the oldest examples of talking animals were used to convey morals. *Aesop's Fables* feature creatures with convincing conversational abilities. Long a part of our language, their alleged utterings, like that used by the frustrated wolf, have been distilled into neat little clichès such as "sour grapes."

The *Legends of the Old Plantation*, popularly known as *Uncle Remus* stories were written down by Joel Chandler Harris (1848-1908) and first published in 1881, the same year that the Tuskegee Institute was founded by Booker T. Washington, and vaudeville cleaned itself up. The tales focus on animal characters such as the resourceful and quick-witted Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox, among others. While working on a plantation, Harris learned the language and stories of the slaves. Brer Bear and Brer Rabbit show that the weaker animals can be more clever than you might suspect. These were based on traditional African trickster tales and folklore and developed by slaves to entertain themselves as well as carry the message to their children that even though you are a slave who is held against your will, in often cruel circumstances, you can outwit your captors and maintain some dignity and self-respect. The Uncle Remus tales are a valuable contribution to Southern folklore, capturing the folk tales, speech, and culture of Southern blacks. The quick-witted dummy or figure or "child" that outwits or out smarts the ventriloquist, parent, teacher or authority, follows in this theme, more closely than in *Aesop's Fables*.

Unknown ventriloquist with a monkey figure

Animals have almost always talked in stories most American children are familiar with, long before Disney animated them. These include the ever-popular *The Three Bears*, and *The Three Little Pigs*, among many others. Many comic books put words in the minds and mouths of animals which are to be read as both thinking and speech. Animated cartoons are populated with talking animals who live the lives of middle America, or in the case of Scrooge McDuck, the rich and famous. Movie and television characters include Francis, the talking mule, who made his movie debut in 1949 talking to Donald O'Connor, and his last one, in 1956 with Mickey Rooney. In fact when annual awards for animal actors in the movies was started in 1951, Francis won the first "Picture Animal Top Star of the Year" (PATSY) award (animal Oscar), and the director was Arthur Lubin, who would later direct *Mr. Ed.* On *The People's Choice* (1955) TV show, Jackie Cooper starred as Socrates (Sock) Miller, along with his basset hound, "Cleo," who thinks out loud, but only to us — a soliloquy on silly humans. *Mr. Ed*, television's talking horse, from 1961-1965, and seen in reruns, also deserves mention, even if he didn't say so himself. Mr. Ed, played by Bamboo Harvester, only spoke to Wilbur Post, (and occasionally children) an architect played by Alan Young, because, and this is straight from the horse's mouth, he had never before met anyone worth talking to. He also won some PATSY awards. One early episode was even called "The Ventriloquist," with that as the explanation for some strange occurrences. Talky Tawny, a talking tiger dressed in human clothes, appeared in Captain Marvel comics, before cereal spokestiger Tony the Tiger stole the show.

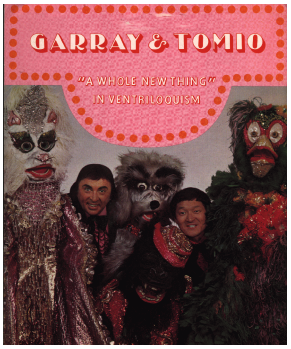
Dr. Dolittle, one of the series of stories by Hugh Lofting (1886-1947) of the good Doctor and his adventures, goes beyond speech, with its obvious animal oddities, yet those creatures never spoke to us, but only to the good Doctor himself which the 1967 movie kept true to the book. The 1998 remake has animals that talk, but is not for children. Babe, the movie star, who would appear to be a "Learned Pig" if ever there was one, did not actually talk to people. Babe spoke to other animals and therefore what we heard as Babe's speech was a combination of simultaneous translation and soliloquy. Babe was played by audioanimatronic and live pigs. Television commercials have fruit, raisins, frogs, dogs, cats, other animals, (and numerous appliances) speak, sing and dance.

Wherever there are animals that talk, there seem to be people, as with the good Doctor himself, who claim to talk to them. In the same way that birds say words without moving their mouth, thus, imitating ventriloquists, so to speak, there are ventriloquists who, with their caricatures of wisecracking creatures and clever dialogue, burlesque the birds and beasts, and do more than Dolittle.

Certainly, turnabout is fair play. Humans have learned to imitate animals and use those skills for hunting, *shamanistic* rituals and one aspect of a form of ventriloquial entertainment which is called polyphony. In times past the audience was expected to imagine the creatures whose sounds and cries they heard. Polyphonists entertained without actually having an animal in their presence. Times have changed and now even cuddly, colorful creatures once thought to be the domain of children, have starred on the stage from Las Vegas to Atlantic City and toured in between. Considering that George Orwell's *Animal Farm* is strictly for adults, this type of act is also "Not For Children Only," because even sophisticated audiences readily accept animals that talk, when prominent performers ply their trade.

There are numerous ventriloquists with variations on the theme deserving of inclusion. Many of those who are more widely known are found in other chapters. These include Shari Lewis with "Lamb Chop," and "Charlie Horse," Jay Marshall and "Lefty," Charming Cecelia Chicken had many chats with the sensational Señor Wences, and gave him a peck on the cheek, to hatch a batch of laughs. Clifford Guest, the awesome Australian voice thrower, had a baby kangaroo which heckled from the pouch of its mother. Jimmy "...The very best.." Nelson, garnered laughs with his witty kitty, "Ftatateeta," However, his famous floppy-eared friend "Farfel," the doleful dog with the soulful eyes, sold more chocolate for Nestles, with one word "Chaaaaawklit!" than anyone else could with a whole dictionary. [See "..To TV" for details] Howie Olson used "Oogie" a talking panda. One character who hardly needed even one word was W.S. Berger's amazing "Jocko the Monkey" who was quite expressive with so many facial movements. You can see him in action in the chapter "The Birth of a Dummy." Here are some, to give you a sampling.

Riotous Ronn Lucas has a timid talking turtle, a cute creature whose features he creates from a cardboard cut-out and a stocking.



Garray and Tomio

Carl Garray and Tomio still maintain a busy career in all the major showplaces. They have a menagerie of massive critters, each housed in a small crate-like box which is on the stage through the whole show. Then Carl would come out at the end of the ninety minutes or so to do his act. He would open the first box and pull out the animal which is confined there. Once they stood up, each was over five-feet tall and garishly dressed. He introduces them to the audience one at a time. They include: a chicken, a parrot, a horse, and a gorilla. They interact with each other in rapid-fire chatter to enrapture the audience. After the bows... Well in the past reviewers never revealed the ending, nor did people who would bring their friends. The surprise is just too good to give away. Because Garray and Tomio are still active, we, too, will honor their request to keep the secret. The rapt crowd is always quite taken with, and then taken aback by, their gigantic antics. If they come your way, or even if you have to go out of your way, go see it. It is an absolutely unforgettable act, with subtle nuances. Sit up close, to get the best view.

While John W. Cooper and others, used a parrot in their acts, ventriloquial virtuoso Dan Ritchard, author of the excellent "How-To" book, *Ventriloquism for the Total Dummy*, entertains with his pal, delightful Conrad Burdee, Freelance Parrot. Conrad is a self-proclaimed "Amusician," (he plays the bugle in a funny way) and is known for impressive improvisational ad-libs, bantering like a bird who thinks he's almost human. As George Schindler says in his own book, Dan's telephone voice is "in the tradition of The Great Lester." He can make anyone a believer in the voice on the receiver. Like the Great Lester, he originated both "The Tap Dancer on the Telephone" while he or Conrad hums along, and the "Time-line" calls to Paul Revere, where you hear his horse galloping and then two different voices talking to each other.

Another bird was the crow used by Kenny Byrd.

A less-than-ferocious "King of the Jungle," is "Lenny the Lion." He appears shy and friendly when tamed by talented Terry Hall, of Liondon... er, London, England. According to the handbill (lower right) Terry Hall also worked with an Irish figure named Micky Flynn. At the bottom it says, "Search for a voice," but it is not related to ventriloquism. Notice that, when enlarged, you can see the name of the managing director, at the top right, is Val Parnell.

Rabbits are popular and Sandy Rings and Rollo the Rabbit are even more popular together, as mentioned in the chapter on women. Yet rabbits are also often associated with magic. Genial George Schindler, ventriloquist/magician, and respected member of both the magic and ventriloquism communities served as National President (1992-1993) of the Society of American Magicians. He is also the author of numerous magic and ventriloquism books. One even has a combination title: *Ventriloquism — Magic With Your Voice*. So it would be perfectly logical if he were to combine the bunny rabbit of magic, with his ventriloquial skills to make it talk. Poof! And so it is. Cecil the bunny becomes quite funny, in George's most capable hands. And his book of 149 pages, and lots of photos, starts with the basics, teaches you all the techniques, and even gives you some complete comedy routines so you too can be funny with your bunny or whatever dummy. The original Cecil is retired and currently resides at the Society of American Magicians Hall of Fame museum.

DeMar and Friends

Similarly, "Ventertainer," author of *Kid Show Ventriloquism*, and ConVENTion organizer Mark Wade, is in the habit of using a rabbit.

Bill DeMar, and inventive fellow, made a career of entertaining nightclub goers with his human-like and animal friends.

Quinn Horn, daughter of ventriloquist Dan Horn, and a fine ventriloquist in her own right, has talked with a fish, or is that "to a fish?" or really "for a fish?" Well, something is fishy for sure. Her friend may feel like a fish out of water, but creative Quinn is surely at home on the stage. What will she be up to next?

Stephen Knowles, an excellent singer, is well known for his skill and creativity. Among his, and his audience's favorite characters, is Peter Pelican, best remembered for a superb and surprising rendition of *Under the Boardwalk*. Knowles can be seen on TV, and at the top venues here and abroad.

Valentine Vox, author and versatile English entertainer, can perform in Japanese and German. He is the founder and curator of the Museum of Movies and Magic in Las Vegas, Nevada, which features a fine exhibit on ventriloquism, and where he has hosted conventions for his peers. Vox performs there, and around the world, too, with Jorge, a zany dog of another color. Be sure to see Jorge's splashy flea act that is literally a blast.

Brad Cummings has a precocious baby dinosaur who proves to be a clever and facile fossil. Of course, as with Dr. Doolittle, when a ventriloquist uses puppets, he or she is no longer limited to mere variations on the natural species, extinct or extant. A whole imaginary menagerie can come to life, as well.

As one of Aesop's fables, *The Lion and the Statue* puts it so well:

> A Man and a Lion were discussing the relative strength of men and lions in general. The Man contended that he and his fellows were stronger than lions by reason of their greater intelligence. "Come now with me," he cried, "and I will soon prove that I am right." So he took him into the public gardens and showed him a statue of Hercules overcoming the Lion and tearing his mouth in two.
>
> "That is all very well," said the Lion, "but proves nothing, for it was a man who made the statue."
>
> Moral: We can easily represent things as we wish them to be.

Puppeteers are quite adept at representing almost anything as they would wish it to be, such as that close relative of the dinosaur — the dragon. With some creative puppet making and deft puppetry, that ever-popular fire breathing beast of the imagination moves from the idea stage to center stage.

Randel McGee of California knows about dragon puppets. He is the Pacific South West Regional Director for the Puppeteers of America, and a UNIMA-USA Board member. He also is a member of the National Storytelling Association among other organizations. His partner Groark is a dragon whose antics and guitar playing — you have to see it — add to a potpourri of entertainment, across the United States, and in Asia. They do the regular family venues and are also the stars of an award-

winning video series: “Prevent Violence with Groark,” seen on many PBS affiliates throughout the U.S.A.

Bob Shimer gives live performances combining storytelling, puppeteering, and ventriloquism with his buddy Drango Dragon, and his other zany puppet friends. Following in the grand tradition of his creative predecessors, by writing some of his own tales, their “Magic of Stories” performances and strolling entertainment bring smiles to all ages.

Ronn Lucas works with Scorch, a complex fellow who had his own television show. [See “The Birth of the Dummy”]

Jim Morrison, of Australia has a pal who is the star of “The Drippy Dragon Show.” In Mr Jim’s own words, “Picture a cute fluffy green and red dragon puppet about two feet high sitting on the knee of a brightly dressed adult who is not quite as bright as his clothes. Drippy does all the things that kids love to do while poor old Mr Jim is trying to get on with the show. Of course the kids side with Drippy when he wants to sing their favorite songs or tell jokes....”

Of course there are mythical sea creatures, but after all, anything is possible.

John Bouchard, makes waves of laughter ripple through audiences who hear his talking mermaid, a must-see sea sprite.

Then there are creatures who defy easy description. There is the genie in the bottle, the talking microphone and all manner of crawly things, where Jay Johnson is probably the best-known ventriloquist that talks to an invisible bug. Comedy Award winner, Jeff Dunham works with a Woozle, which is an, uh well ahh... hmm...

In jokes and stories, man’s best friend is often given the power of speech. There are some jokes about talking animals and true stories about ventriloquists who fooled, or startled people with a stunt, along with many tall tales, but how about a real live dog that talked? Leonardo had such a dog. ...well the dog *was* real and live, but it didn’t truly talk; it just looked that way. So did Donskoi and Bavitski. By having his dog “speak,” Bavitski got himself out of a jam. [See “Every Country Has One”] They used an older method popular with ventriloquists of that day. Saveen, an Englishman, had a convincing talking dog, too. We won’t reveal their secrets here, out of respect for today’s successful ventriloquists who use that clever ruse, among them Todd Oliver, who converses with Irving the bulldog. ...and that’s no shaggy dog story.

Clearly the fascinating animals that talk, such as Alex the Parrot and Hoover the harbor seal show that there is more to this than we would think at first glance. But that isn’t enough to make “an act.” No, performers need loquacious, witty partners who will be reliable and perform on cue. Some use live animals on the stage, but their voices are supplied by ventriloquism. Then of course, while you may recall that Potter “made” a roast pig squeal, there is a young lady by the name of Alicia Dacoba who converses with a live pig, “Pork Chop,” as well as “Myron,” a real live miniature quarter horse, [so designated for the quarter-mile races they run]. A charming lady who is an excellent ventriloquist, she makes the illusion quite convincing. In 1993,

she appeared with three of our top professionals, Jim Barber, Dan Horn and Brad Cummings, with a guest appearance by Vonda Kay Van Dyke, former Miss America and her partner “Curly,” on a *Vicky* TV show about ventriloquism. Vicky used a custom Verna puppet as “Mama.” The show was quite a tribute to the art.

Do animals *really* talk? Just ask them. Surely, all across America the Elephant and the Donkey can be seen campaigning and heard complaining. They say things they didn’t say, or things they were made to say or put words into the mouths of their opponents. They are political animals.

“Uncle Sam” is a Pinxy figure with
a fright wig and several movements.

Part Seven

Ventriloquism Enters Politics

It may be demeaning to call the spokesman for the President a ventriloquist's dummy, but isn't that what he is? After all, he's not supposed to deliver his own comments or answer questions as if he were speaking for himself.[57]

The incisive must-read book, *The Joys of Jargon* put it quite bluntly in one of its delightful chapters. Political observers and commentators, in their quest to burst the bubbles of pomposity, hypocrisy and corruption, have used every manner of subject to poke fun at political figures, sometimes likening them to ventriloquists' figures, where someone else puts words in their mouths. This goes way beyond politicians having speech writers who ghost their public addresses. It is more akin to a "puppet" government where the elected official manipulates, or is manipulated, from behind the scenes. An excellent example is Dave Lieber's piece in *The Star-Telegram*, of July 31, 1997, "In Perot play, who looks like dummy now?"

> All those months, we listened to the Westlake Board of Aldermen as they talked and talked.. They used big words..... They always said they were thinking and speaking for themselves. While this happened, we looked at Ross Perot Jr. and his lieutenants and their lips never moved. As it turns out, we were watching a ventriloquism act so good that even Ed Sullivan w`ould have smiled. And now, ladies and gentlemen, right here on our show, please welcome the amazing Talking Aldermen!...

He goes on to slice and dice his target following the theme. Of course, this is aimed at the generation that knows about Ed Sullivan, or those who have seen some of the retrospectives, to get the flavor of Sullivan's unique speech pattern and pacing.

Well-connected sources say that talented Jim Teter set precedents when he elected to present past and present United States presidents, or at least life-sized looking caricatures of them. Teter is a ventriloquial impersonator, a kind of speech maker who actually puts words in their mouths. High ranking observers say he recreates their voices adeptly, while maintaining his ventriloquial technique. Wit watchers have observed that his characters spoof their famous namesakes accurately, without taxing the audience. He

Jim Teter and all the man's presidents

stands on his platform in front of large crowds and promises to deliver vast amounts of laughter. Polls indicate he makes good on that promise. In his act, the spokesman is the ventriloquist. Who is responsible for "The Making of the President(s)?" Figure maker Frank Butler did it.

Richard B. Eckhaus wrote an interesting and honest article in 1996 for The Phoenix Media/Communication Group "Why Jerry won't change — Seinfeld's still ticking, despite our critic's licking." He went out on a limb and laments that, because his opinion was in print, he can't change what he said, "When a politician sticks his foot in his mouth, a spin doctor can be counted on to say that we didn't really hear what we thought we heard but were victims of a subversive act of ventriloquism." He explains his prediction predicament — he thought the show wouldn't last!

Jack Fuller, president and publisher of the *Chicago Tribune*, wrote *News Values*, (University of Chicago Press, 1996). He points out the need for honesty and accuracy. He feels that quotation marks should be just that but reporters tend toward what he calls "journalistic ventriloquism" too often, not accurate reporting.

There are also critics who use similar terms to describe writers who do not express what their subject said or intended, but substitute either their own ideas or even their own words in misquotes. Thus, terms such as "literary ventriloquism," "philosophical ventriloquism," "poetic ventriloquism" and "historical ventriloquism" are applied. They use the concept and craft of ventriloquism as a metaphor for "putting words in someone's mouth."

Sometimes a picture or a cartoon is worth a thousand words. On May 9, 1754, The Pennsylvania *Gazette*, in Philadelphia, the center of the colonies' struggle for independence, published the first cartoon. It was neither the "funnies" nor ventriloquism, but illustrated the motto "Join or Die" to get the colonies to unite for strength. The revolution was still two decades away. Thomas Nast was the cartoonist who gave us the donkey and elephant symbols, which have stuck all this time, along with St. Nick's memorable face and figure. When a political cartoon is out of the contemporary context the audience needs a few words. Here then, with minimum words, are a fair sampling:

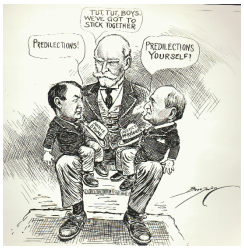
This is an example of the "talking hand. Both the hand with the body below, and the catchphrase, "Sawright," are taken right out of the well known act of Señor Wences, – a dead giveaway as to where the idea was copied from, though without attribution. Because the stellar ventriloquist is best remembered from his many appearances on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, the reference is clearly meant for older audiences who see the connection. Though younger readers would not recognize the source of the idea, they would probably catch on to its intent. The cartoon, in *Newsweek*, November 30, 1987 refers to the Reagan administration's secret funding of the Contras (rebels) in El Salvador — surely politically, legally and diplomatically incorrect., and once again using ventriloquism to portray something negative.

Herbert Hoover threw his dummy into the waste basket and spoke directly to the press, who all look rather pleased. Having a direct audience with the president is an unusual and special privilege. This is a graphic depiction of the quotation that opened this section. To eliminate guesswork, or due to lack of faith in the reader's ability, the dummy is even labeled "White House Spokesman," to make sure even the least perceptive reader knows exactly what was happening.

Andrew Young was Jimmy Carter's Ambassador to the United Nations. While Carter, as President, is supposed to make the policy, Young decides to have private, unauthorized talks with the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization). Young, though sitting on Carter's lap, much like a knee figure might, is actually the ventriloquist and says so, speaking "for" Carter. While this cartoonist borrowed the idea from the "switch" acts, because it is easily recognized, he still labels one of the players to get the idea across. Though not actually using the word, he implies, rather pointedly and unkindly, that Young has made Carter the dummy.

FDR (Franklin Delano Roosevelt) was quietly seeking an unprecedented third term as President. He said nothing to the public or press about his plans. Yet at the Democratic Convention, the delegates, serving as "the dummy," spoke and said that FDR will run. This cartoon uses the image of a ventriloquist because it says concisely what is happening. Not only is a picture worth a thousand words, but the widely understood concept and image of a ventriloquist served this cartoonist by showing FDR as the ventriloquist sitting down, requesting his dummy as the curtain on the convention goes up.

President William McKinley, in an election year, spoke through two dummies in conflict, marked on their shoes; Duty (left) and Destiny (right). They symbolized the conflict between those who wanted to raise the import tariffs, (duty) and those who wanted to annex the kingdom of Hawaii. Again, the concept served to convey the idea to the reader.

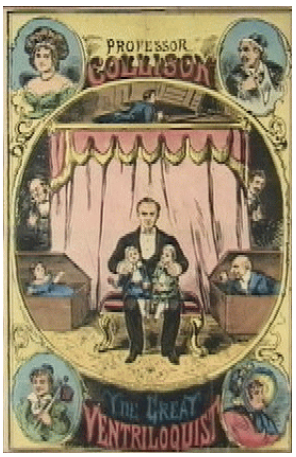


Though Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes may at first look like he is a ventriloquist, from the position of his hands, it appears as though he is more like the father or teacher, attempting to get two squabbling justices, bad boys, to settle their differences and "stick together." During the year 1937, ventriloquism, primarily due to Bergen, was a prominent topic in the press, movies and on radio, and the "look" was most likely used just to grab attention.

Part Eight

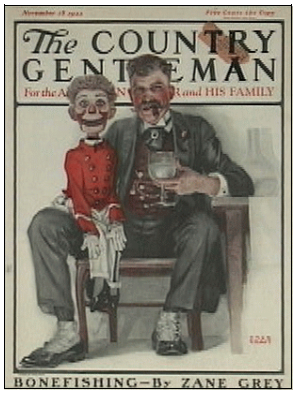
A Photo Gallery of Vintage Vents

Al Silver

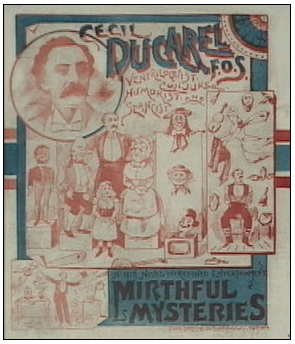


Collison

Chesterfield, father of Howie Olson



C. Powers



Harry Lu

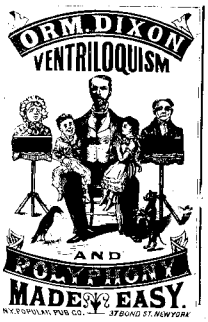
Part Nine

The Last Word

The manner in which comedy routines are structured, whether with a set-up line and punch line in clever repartee, or a remark with subtle irony, the dummy usually gets the punch line — the last word. However, after those early years of fiddle lessons that led me to my vocation of playing second fiddle to my wooden partners my entire life, it seems only fitting that ***I*** should finally have the last word.

I cannot help but ask, "What other field of endeavor affords such odd opportunities, interesting experiences, and unique ways of stretching the imagination as have been related in these pages?" I'm sure that there are others, but, speaking for myself, once I put my hand inside Noel Lester's dummy at the Dime Museum, ***I*** have never looked back. Not at missed opportunities anyway — only at the origins of my profession and the diversity of my predecessors.

So, a salute and a "well done" to those who have come before, and hearty good wishes to aspiring newcomers, whether the art is an absorbing hobby or demanding profession. If you only have a tenth of the enjoyment I have, you will be well rewarded. A toast to all of you. "Carry on the traditions of the 'greats' of the past and continue to enhance this ageless, age-old art with your own concepts, research, personality and inanimate creations."



Another one was entitled — take a deep breath — *Orm Dixon, the English star ventriloquist; or, Ventriloquism and polyphony made easy, being an efficient and simple method of learning the vastly entertaining art, based upon the experience of a professional exhibitor. The simplest method ever published*. Dixon, Orm. New York, New York Popular Publishing Co. [n.d.] If you can say it three times on one breath, you could be a ventriloquist!

Dr. Lichi, Bruce, Cecil, (Bruce's own little dummy)and the author.

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GLOSSARY

This is not meant as a comprehensive dictionary of all show-business slang, or all words used, but merely as a handy and helpful guide to our readers of diverse ages and experiences. The majority of terms that may not be familiar have been explained in the text. The following list should help to elaborate, clear up any confusion, and put most of them in one accessible place along with related terms. Some of these terms have left their show business roots and become assimilated into informal use by non-performers.

Ad-lib – To improvise and deliver extemporaneously. To engage in improvisation, as during delivery of a speech. Commonly, the varying of a line, or throwing in a totally new line, during a set routine or script. [note the hyphen]

Ad lib – *adv*. In an unrestrained manner; spontaneously. [Short for ad libitum.]

Ad libitum – *adj*. Music. At the discretion of the performer. Used chiefly as a direction giving license to alter or omit a part.

Banana, Top – See: Top Banana

Big Time/Small Time – There were basically two kinds of vaudeville: big time meant you only did two shows a day and were doing all right; small time required up to six shows a day, which was hectic, but each act ran only ten minutes.

Bill – The program of the show, listing the acts, usually in the order of their appearance. Also, handbill, a throwaway advertisement listing the program, date, time, place and price. When not thrown away, they become memorabilia.

Billing – One's place in the order of the acts in vaudeville. Top of the bill meant you were featured; bottom of the bill meant you were the new act on the block. But, the opening, or first spot was the worst spot in the show, because the audience was not fully warmed up and people came in late and interrupted. The first act was usually a **dumb** act. There were different opinions on closing the show. Some said closing was the best, others said that 'next to close' was the best. See: Headliner also Dumb Act

Biopic – Bioh pik (blend of **bio**graphy and **pic**ture) A film or television biography, often with fictionalized episodes. The courts seem to have determined that *The Great Gabbo* was an unauthorized, inaccurate and detrimental biopic of The Great Lester.

Bit – This is a short piece of comedy business. It could be physical business, "slip on a banana peel" bit or it could be a short routine, such as "The Baby Crying Bit" or "a comical dissertation on noses," as presented by Richard Potter.

Biz – Business, for example, Show biz, is short for Show business, also Show Business.

Blackout – In vaudeville, it did not have the meanings it has today. It has nothing to do with restricted TV broadcasting of sports events, suppression of news, fainting, widespread power failures, or dousing the lights during air raids. A blackout was the sudden extinguishment of all stage lights in a theater to indicate the passage of time or especially to mark the end of an act or a scene, usually on the last big laugh, or after a big surprise that cannot be topped. Later, the short, comic vaudeville scene or surprise skit that ends with lights off, became known as a "blackout."

Boff – Slang. A line in a play or film, for example, that gets a big laugh, or the big laugh itself. Also called boffo, boffola. [Probably from (**bo**x **off**ice) and then also with an "o" moved to the end. (See next word)

Boffo – Show biz (see above) slang blend meaning "really good box office," or it is really good for the **box office** because it brings in customers.

Book – To hire or engage. Derives from putting the information into the book, and on the calendar. Similar to police booking a suspect, but much more pleasant and profitable. In the theater, "book" means the play as it is written.

Bootblack – A person who cleans and shines, or polishes, shoes and boots. Not used very often today.

Borscht Belt (Circuit) – So named for the food, borscht, a beet soup served hot or cold, usually with sour cream. [Yiddish *borsht*, from Russian *borshch*, cow parsnip (the original base of the soup), borscht.] served to primarily Jewish patrons who frequented the numerous, around fifty, larger hotels and smaller bungalow colonies in the Catskill Mountains of northerly New York State. From the nineteen-twenties to the late fifties they were very popular because they provided a way to escape the hot city. However, by the sixties, when air conditioning became affordable for homes, and travel costs came down, they were losing customers who preferred to stay home or travel for the summer, or have the option to do both. Few hotels are left today. Many famous performers got their start in the "belt." They would go from hotel to hotel in a miniature tour and work on their acts. Today the Borscht Belt is quite different and usually has only top name acts for the weekend, so some can get a start during the week.

Box Seat – also "boxes" A seat in a box at a public place of entertainment, such as a theater or stadium. Usually more exclusive and private when compared to general seating.

Box Office – So named because it was originally an office for the booking of boxes, or box seats, in a theater. It has come to mean the drawing power of a theatrical entertainment or of a performer; that is, the ability to keep the box office busy and sell out all boxes or seats. Thus, it means "popular appeal." It can also mean the amount of money received from ticket sales for an entertainment.

Break a leg – There is an old quirky show business superstition that it is bad luck to wish a fellow performer good luck. The term break a leg was substituted, which while not sounding lucky, really means, "Dance so hard you break a leg" — or do your best, and hopefully your efforts will be noticed and will pay off.

Broadside – A forceful verbal attack, as in a speech or editorial. A large sheet of paper usually printed on one side. Also, something, such as an advertisement or public notice, that is printed on a broadside. Also called broadsheet, which is not so commonly used today. Attacking a political opponent on a large poster is a broadside on a broadside.

Burlesque (Burke, Burleque) – A form of live stage entertainment, as an offshoot of vaudeville, with scantily clad female dancers and risquè humor. As movies and stage shows got more risquè, and clothing became more revealing, there was no need to go to burlesque houses, so they faded away, though there are some around and also the pornographic version is still in business.

Business – Usually a physical action that is not specifically part of the script, also called a piece of business. Farfel the dog's jaw snap was a piece of business — very big business.

Busk – Performing in the street or at a fair and passing the hat to the audience for "tips."

Cabaret – What restaurants that offered entertainment were called before they were called nightclubs.(also supperclubs) They provided short programs of live entertainment, including singers and variety acts. Condensed Vaudeville with extra singing.

Canned – Recorded or taped for repeated use on television or radio, especially used in the phrase "canned laughter." See: Laugh Track

Casino – A public room or building for gambling and other entertainment. Casino comes from casa (house) and means little house or cottage. Compared to the gargantuan gambling halls that exist today, it is an ironic term.

Catchphrase – a phrase, slogan or line that is associated with a character and gets a laugh when they use it. When angry or thwarted, Charlie McCarthy used the line, "I'll mow ya down!" "S'aw right," is the catchphrase from the, at one time quite familiar, act of Señor Wences.

Caveat Emptor – The axiom or principle in commerce that the buyer alone is responsible for assessing the quality of a purchase before buying. From Latin, "let the buyer beware."

Cheeky – Impertinently bold; impudent and saucy.

Class Act – *Informal*. One of distinctive and superior quality, usually clean.

Clog Dance – A dance performed while wearing clogs, a type of heavy wooden-soled shoe, and characterized by heavy, stamping steps. Clog dancer. Think of it as tap dancing lumber, or lumbering tap dancing.

Cod Performer – A spoof or parody on either a particular performer, similar to an impersonation, or on a whole style of performing.

Coliseum also colosseum – A large amphitheater for public sports events, entertainment, or assemblies, originally a building named for its location next to a colossus, a large statue, in much the same way as establishments today are named for a prominent attraction or landmark nearby.

Comedy – A dramatic work with a light and usually humorous, satirical tone, often with humorous conflict, and usually a happy resolution. Popular entertainment composed of jokes, satire, parody, or witty performance.

Debut also début – From the French, a first public appearance, as of a performer or a show (or the introduction into "high society" of the debutante). It is closely connected with entertainment and the performing arts but is not entirely acceptable when used for other sorts of introductions, such as products, but might be used for a revolutionary process. Movies and plays usually premiere, meaning introduce their first performance. Premiere is rarely used outside of show business. An actor or actress (a word that is disappearing) can make their Broadway debut in a play that premieres or their screen debut in a movie that premieres.

Dialect Humor – Not as common now, or politically correct, this is based on the various dialects used by immigrants to America. Ricky Layne's partner Velvel, speaks with a Yiddish dialect.

Doll – A child's usually small toy representing a human being. The word doll was first recorded for a child's toy in the 1700s. Not commonly used by ventriloquists to describe their partners.

Dummy – An imitation of a real or original object; A figure of a person or an animal manipulated by a ventriloquist. Dummy is a common term used in fashion, football, the elusive or evasive corporate world, printing (sample layout), especially in advertising and package layout, and in the game of bridge, though most ventriloquists use the word figure or partner, especially in England where dummy is not used, perhaps because it is the word for a baby's pacifier.

Dumb Act – A silent act. Dumb acts were often used at the beginning and close of a vaudeville show because the comings and goings of the audience made too much noise for a talking or singing act to be heard, especially before the days of microphones. Silent movies were also used at the end, for this reason. Sometimes bad acts were used at the end of the show to encourage people to leave. Emptying the theater completely and rapidly made more seats available and kept things on schedule. This is one reason for the difference of opinion regarding the best place on the bill — next to last or last.

Eccentric Dancer – A comedic, loose-limbed approach to tap dancing or soft-shoe dancing. Dick Van Dyke's funny dance with the penguins in Mary Poppins is an example.

Emcee – The spelled-out form of MC taken from the initials of **M**aster of **C**eremonies, the person who is in charge of the stage out front. The job of the Interlocutor/introducer of the acts in Minstrel shows evolved into the Master of Ceremonies or M.C. (also emcee). The MC warms up the audience, then introduces acts, usually with humor, keeps things moving, or fills in time if something goes wrong and the next act, or the stage, is not ready. It looks easy but it is demanding. Compere is the equivalent in merry olde England.

Emmy – The highest award given in television. The statuettes awarded annually by the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences for outstanding achievement in television, from acting to directing, to lighting or special effects, to name but a scant few. Actually named for the Image Orthicon Tube, or Immy, the tube in the camera that "sees" the action. Immy was changed to the more feminine Emmy. This author could see that it is also the spelled-out version of ME, as in, choose ME!

English Music Hall – As indicated, this is an English form of variety entertainment that preceded vaudeville, which was similar. Musical numbers, comedy, mime, and various novelty acts such as magicians, ventriloquists, jugglers, acrobats and animal acts were presented under its banner. There are some crossover acts from the circus arts, but with more variety and fewer animals than in a circus.

Extra – A film term for a non-speaking role. An early film term for extras came from the opera, where non-singing performers were called supers, from supernumeraries, meaning above the number or numberless or too many to count (crowd), perhaps why someone with a minor role doesn't count.

Feature – The main film presentation at a theater. A full-length film, in contrast to shorts. In the old days, you would see two features and shorts and possibly a newsreel for one admission. See: Short

Fool – A member of a royal or noble household who provided entertainment, as with jokes or antics; a jester. Also, to confound or prove wrong; surprise, especially pleasantly. Some spoof ventriloquists tried to fool the audience into thinking they were real ventriloquists, before giving the secret away.

Fourth Wall – An imaginary wall created by the performer as the front of the stage, to separate their performing space from the audience. It is an acting technique used to aid concentration. When a performer interacts with the audience, by a look, gesture, or comment, or by actually going into the auditorium, they are said to be "breaking the fourth wall." George Burns made a career of it. Frank Byron Jr. did it to great effect when he turned to the audience and declared, "This guy is dead."

Fright Wig – A wig that made the wearer look like the bride of Frankenstein, just for a laugh. Also one that can be manipulated to make the hair stand up. The clip of Uncle Sam shows his fright wig.

Gag Man – A writer for comics, both stand-up and newspaper panel, as well as greeting cards and other places where humor is needed.

Gag – A wisecrack, joke, or bit of business used to get a laugh. A "Running Gag" is a joke or bit that is used once and then later repeated or implied. The continued reference to the same joke gives the audience an "in" since anyone coming in later would not get the point. The laughs are supposed to build with each repetition, usually to a limit of three, but if the audience is with you, you can push the envelope a little. Some running gags are used from film to film, for those who "get it," and can be very funny. John Cooper had Sam, the bootblack, pop out of the discard container, as a running gag.

Gig – A job in show business. This was originally a musician's term.

Grammy – A service mark used for any of the statuettes awarded by the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences for excellence in the recording industry. Named after the Gramophone, the trademark of Edison's record player.

Headliner – Someone at the top of the bill (See: Billing), the featured act, so called because their name was in larger, bolder type — a headline — than others on the bill.

Heavy – A bad guy. The term evolved from silent films where the villains wore heavy make-up, which included bushy eyebrows, mustaches, beards.

Hoofer – Show biz slang for a dancer. It originated in vaudeville for a tap and/or soft shoe dancer, who may have even learned the craft with little or no formal training.

Iconoscope – An early form of a television-camera tube, equipped for rapid scanning of an information-storing, photoactive mosaic. Its poor light sensitivity required very bright, and therefore very hot, lights, very close to your face. Originally a trademark, derived from combining "Icon" meaning an image or representation. [Ultimately from Greek eikon *eikono*] plus -scope, a suffix meaning an instrument for viewing or observing. [New Latin -*scopium*, from Greek -*skopion*, from *skopein*, to see. No longer used.

Improv – Abbreviation for Improvisation – It is ad-libbing an entire scene, rather than one quick comeback, or as a follow-up to a foul-up. Usually the performer is given a premise and told who they are to be. They then "go with it" Robin Williams is well known for his improvisational ability. See: Ad-lib.

In the Can – "Complete" After the film is shot, it is placed into the metal can for safekeeping. It has other slang uses today.

Jim Crow – or jim crow. (From a song and dance, by a man with that name) A slang expression for the systematic practice of discriminating against, and suppressing, Black people. Terms such as "Jim Crow laws" and a "Jim Crow town" refer to places that practiced discrimination and legally reserved or set aside jobs or places for a racial or ethnic group that is to be discriminated against, primarily the American Negro. It comes from a 19th century minstrel song, introduced and popularized by Thomas Dartmouth Rice who was a pioneer in comical racist caricatures of blacks. Though Rice did not initiate the theatrical entertainment of the self-styled "Ethiopian minstrelsy" he did popularize it on both sides of the Atlantic. According to fellow actor Edmon S. Conner, in an article in the New York *Times*, June 5, 1881, p.10 (there were only twelve pages then) "Negro minstrelsy was then in its infancy and attracted little attention but Rice was particularly good in 'little negro bits.'" While Rice and Conner were performing in a Louisville theater one summer, from a dressing room window Rice had observed a livery-stable slave owned by a fellow named Crow. In a practice that was common he had taken his owner's name and called himself Jim Crow. He was deformed and walked and danced with an odd limp. He crooned an old tune, substituting his own words, ending each verse with an irregular off beat step to set 'heel a-rockin' and then sang, "I jump Jim Crow." Here is a refrain from the song that started it, which the original Jim Crow called, "jumping Jim Crow."

"Wheel about, and turn about,
Do jis so.
An' ebery time I wheel about,
I jump Jim Crow."

Rice was amused and knew he had a new theatrical role to play. He made some changes, composed new verses, and increased the tempo. Thus, in 1832 he blackened his face and shuffled his way into the spotlight, presenting it first to a jubilant Louisville audience which reveled in the act. "Jim Crow" thus danced his way across the Atlantic and into the lexicon. This hit was copied by others, and entertainment, a potentially powerful force, unfortunately launched modern minstrelsy, turning a tradition of traveling entertainment into a lasting racist form of humor for well over one hundred years. See: Minstrel.

Kidvid – Slang. Television programs for children, from the initial rhyme of **kid**dy and **vid**eo. Many shows are really promotions or extended commercials for various products.

Laugh Track – Recorded laughter added to a soundtrack, as of a television or radio show. Also said to "sweeten" television comedy shows, when live audiences are not present to supply live laughter to isolated viewers at home, on the premise that laughter is contagious, but you need to catch it from someone, or something that sounds like someone. At one time, ventriloquists used a "Laughing Negro Figure" which did pretty much the same thing. See: Canned Laughter.

Limelight – Originally a means of illuminating the front of the stage or apron, by gas rather than electricity. It has come to mean being in the spotlight, limelight being the early method of spotlighting a performer. Also, anyone who is well known or likes to "be the center of attention."

Lip-Synch (Lip Synchronization, Dumb Act) – Mouthing the words to recorded material. A prevalent act in vaudeville, and used in musical productions, including music videos. Also a term used by ventriloquists who must synchronize the movement of the puppet or dummy's mouth to the words spoken for it. Dumb Act refers to a non-speaking, or performing silently to music, type of act, as some jugglers or magicians perform, not to its merit. See: Dumb Act.

Medium – (**1**.) (pl. Media) The diverse methods of communication: books, newspapers, film, radio, TV, Faxing (Facsimile transmission), the internet, etc. Marshall McCluhan once said that, "The medium is the message." referring to its power, which can be summed up with that famous advertising phrase "As Seen on TV."

Medium – (**2**.) Someone who claims to be able to speak with the dead. From; to mediate or act as a go-between.

Melodrama – A drama, such as a play, film, or television program, characterized by exaggerated emotions, stereotypical characters, and intensified interpersonal conflicts.

Memorabilia – Objects valued for their connection with historical events, culture, or entertainment: handbills, posters, publicity photographs, and other items, as well as the events or experiences worthy of remembrance.

Mime – Abbreviation for Panto**mime** – Silent acting using only the body, gestures and facial expressions to communicate the story. A type of dumb act. Mime was essential in silent films, but dialogue and narrative were often projected as text on the screen, too.

Minstrel – An old word, in use before 1600, to describe anyone whose profession was to entertain his patrons by singing songs, playing music, telling stories or by dancing, and later with buffoonery or juggling.[juggling (or jongling) was a term that included magic and sometimes ventriloquism] While neutral in its original form and intention, it was applied to the variety performance called Minstrel Shows or Minstrelsy, which were performed by white actors who blackened their faces to look like the slaves from whom most of the ideas for the show were taken. This latter insulting and racist minstrel act reached its main audience starting in 1932, when comedian Thomas D. Rice presented an idea in which he caricatured black slaves, particularly a song and dance by a slave named Jim Crow, whose name came to mean segregation. Blacks were not allowed to perform in minstrel shows until much later, when they too, blackened their faces! White performers also outlined their lips with white. While there are similarities to variety entertainment, they are not the same. Minstrel Shows are a uniquely American style of entertainment which, for all its variety, had a set formula. Because of the negative stereotype conveyed by blackface and the derogatory racist routines which were common, it is not considered good form to use similar makeup and skits today, unless it is part of a period piece, documentary or instructional performance. See: Jim Crow.

"Troubadour" is the closest type of French version of a minstrel with the emphasis on composing and singing songs and sonnets rather than novelty skills.

Monologue – One person talking, either to a group, or to themselves as in a soliloquy. Television comics usually do a monologue, consisting of a series of somewhat related jokes on a theme. Ventriloquists usually do a dialogue, with a partner or unseen character. The Great Lester had Frank Byron, Jr. do almost all the talking, so Frank was basically a monologist.Monologists are raconteurs who tell a story, usually of a comic nature. They were at one time quite popular, both during and after vaudeville, and there were many who performed, but today's rapid-fire style has made them all but disappear. Garrison Keillor, with his Lake Woebegon stories, is currently the most well known of this genre.

Nipkow Disk – Named after Paul Nipkow, the young German scientist who first invented a working but impractical mechanical television system in 1884. Though this spinning disk with holes in a spiral would later be abandoned as unsuitable, John Logie Baird developed the idea and used it to transmit images. It required very bright and hot banks of lights. The laws of physics made it impractical to use less light, or get a better than grainy image which was similar to the modern images of a sonogram or infrared picture.

Number – One of the separate offerings in a program of music or other entertainment. "For my next number, I will sing the refrain, from smoking."

Obie – A spelled-out form of OB (not the *ob* as ventriloquist) taken from the initials of **O**ff-**B**roadway. It is the name of the award given for those voted best actor, writer, director, designer, lyricist, show etc.

Olio – Stages are slightly inclined toward the audience. An Olio was an act performed downstage or closer to the audience, while the upstage was being reset for the next performer, often while the curtain was closed. It later came to mean that curtain which covered the upstage preparation from the view of the audience. See: Upstage.

On the Halls – A term for "performing" which was used in British music hall and meant getting it before the audience although Americans used "holding down the boards" or "on the boards" referring to the stage. "Get the show on the road," meant doing the show from town to town though today the phrase has been adopted by the general public simply to mean "start" or "get going."

One Nighter (One-Night Stand) – Usually a series of live performances that play only one night in each town when they finally "got the act on road."

One Reeler (Two Reeler) – The early films that were very short, consisting of one (or two) reels of film and running usually ten minutes, up to about twenty minutes. See: Short.

Orthicon – Also called Image Orthicon. A television camera pickup tube, more sensitive than the iconoscope, that uses a low-velocity electron beam to scan a photoactive mosaic. Ortho from orthochromatic, sensitive to all colors except red and renders red as dark gray and blue and green as light gray. Icon or image [orth(o)- + icon(oscope).] The lights these cameras needed were still very bright, and very hot, but they could be moved further away from your face. See: Iconoscope

Oscar – The highest award the film industry bestows. It was just an anonymous statuette until a secretary joked, "Hey, that looks just like my uncle Oscar!" A reporter overheard it, printed it, and the name stuck. Such is the power of the press.

Palace, The – See: Playing the Palace.

Paparazzo – plural - paparazzi. A freelance photographer who doggedly pursues celebrities to take candid pictures for sale to magazines and newspapers, usually the lower quality ones. Based on Signor Paparazzo, a character in La Dolce Vita, a movie by Federico Fellini. Ventriloquists are rarely the targets of paparazzi.

Papier-mâché – (French) Literally "chewed paper." (Commonly "paper mache") Material made from paper pulp or shreds of paper mixed with glue or paste, which can be molded into various shapes when wet and becomes hard and suitable for drilling, painting and varnishing when dry.

Payoff – When a joke is successful, the laughter it provokes is the payoff. If most of the jokes don't get a payoff, the performer may be off the payroll.

Physical Humor – Visual Comedy. The Three Stooges and actor/comedian Jim Carey are extreme examples. Because Jerry Mahoney had "real" hands, he and Paul Winchell could include physical humor, such as when Jerry accidentally painted Paul's face.

Pika – Any of several small, tailless, furry mammals of the mountains of North America and Eurasia, like hares and rabbits which resemble guinea pigs. Also called coney, rock rabbit. [Tungus piika, perhaps from Russian pikat, to squeak.]

Playing the Palace – The Palace Theater, on Broadway in New York City, was the acme of vaudeville. It was a large, elaborate, ornate place of entertainment. Performing there was the equivalent of getting on a top-rated television show today. Jay Marshall and Stan Burns were honored to be the last ventriloquists, on the same bill, to perform along with other novelty acts, for the show that closed the famous Palace Theater, in 1957. While other cities also had theaters which were called Palace,"Playing the Palace" meant the New York theater of that name, and the pinnacle of performing.

Polyphony – poly = many + phon = sound. In music, it means many sounds, often in conjunction with synthesizers that can sound like myriad instruments. In ventriloquism, it refers to the numerous natural and manmade sounds that a ventriloquist can believably reproduce or mimic. In order for them to be recognized, they should be familiar to the audience. Therefore they might include imitations of birds, animals, insects, breaking an egg, frying an omelet, sawing wood, and a guitar or banjo being strummed, to name a few. A specialist in this method is called a "polyphonist." Clifford Guest reproduces a baby crying and horses galloping, among others.

Prop – Informal abbreviation of the word "property." On a film, or in a play, radio or television show the prop person handles all of the things used during the show. A bag of potato chips, a frying pan, a knife, a dog, a sofa. Props used for comedy could be almost anything. The Great Lester used a telephone, a glass and a decanter of "wine." A dummy is a prop and will be handled by a prop person, in an ongoing show if it belongs to the production. Most ventriloquists will not usually allow anyone else to handle their own figure. As a visitor, it is bad form to handle it or any props they use, or ask a professional if you may, "try the figure out." It is not "show-and-tell" and it puts them in the awkward position of having to refuse. Wait for an invitation, which may or may not come.

Punch line – After the set-up, this is the line which is spoken to get the payoff.
The vent: "Johnny you know about heaven and hell, so tell us what it is you have to do to get to heaven?" [That's the set up.]
Johnny: "First you gotta die." [That's the punch line]

Repartee – (reh par tee) [secondary - tay] A swift, witty reply or conversation with the exchange of witty retorts.

Revue – A combination of skits, songs, and dances presented on stage. It evolved to mean all of those performed as a parody.

Roast – Edgar Bergen and Charlie were among the early "roster of roasters" when they were hired to heckle Noel Coward, the charming English wit, writer and performer, at a private party in his honor. This type of speech, where you first flatten and then flatter the honoree, later came to be called "Roasts." It is a comedy format that was developed to a high art at the Friars' Club, an exclusive show biz hangout for members only, in the theater district in New York City. A

celebrity member is “honored” by friends, usually fellow comedians, who each do nine minutes of comedy insults and one minute of tribute, thus it can and does run for hours. The honoree is allowed a short “rebuttal.” Roasts have since been adopted by others. Though their no-holds-barred outlandish brickbats were originally closed to outsiders, these unceremonious ceremonies are now being televised.

Routine – An individual, set piece of material, especially in a nightclub or theater, derived from the fact that once it was set, it was routinely done the same way every time, possibly up to a thousand times a year. Bergen’s “The Operation” was a routine.

Running Gag – See: Gag

Second Fiddle – Informal. 1. A secondary role. 2. One who plays a secondary role. Fiddle has many negative or silly connotations, like fiddling around, while violin has only one — a musical instrument, so this is possibly a humorous variant of the musical term, “first violin,” an important position. Jack Benny fiddled with his violin while doing his routine. He could play well, but as a comedian the violin played second fiddle to his jokes.

Segment – A show in a series, or one portion of a show.

Sequel – Primarily in films, a new film that continues the plot with characters of the original picture. Later, with Star Wars the prequel was created to go back to the previously unexplained beginnings.

Shop-window – See: Showcase

Short – An early film that lasted about ten minutes and consisted of one reel. Later, it included slightly longer films of two reels. See: One Reeler.

Showcase – In the theater, a showcase is a production designed to display usually unknown performers, often working for free or for transportation costs, so they may be seen “at work,” by agents. It also helps to hone their skills. The verb “to showcase” is used to mean “appear publicly for the first time (here).” While showcase has the word show in it, which sounds theatrical, the British term is “shop-window,” which indicates quite clearly that the production is a place for agents to shop around for performers.

Shtick – also schtick or shtik – Slang. A Yiddish (from German) term, now adopted in English, for comedy business or bit of business. “The Odd Couple,” by Neil Simon, had lots of conflicting shtick based on each of their eccentricities. The spinning head of a dummy is a common, clichèd, piece of shtick. It was given a new life when the movie *The Exorcist* premiered.

Sibilant – Of, characterized by, or producing a hissing sound like that of (s) (sh) (z), or (zh). A term often used to refer to the ventriloquists of old who made these sounds appear to come from the ground.

Situation Comedy – (Sitcom) A humorous radio or television series featuring the reactions of a regular cast of characters to unusual or awkward, often quite contrived, situations, such as misunderstandings or embarrassing coincidences. *I Love Lucy* and *The Honeymooners* are perennial situation comedies, usually requiring generous suspension of disbelief to accept the situation and actions.

Sketch – A short comedy routine where the comedians play roles in a specific situation or scene. Arthur Prince, Leonardo, Fred Russell, and many other ventriloquists created elaborate sketches during the Golden Age of Vaudeville.

Skit – The same as a sketch, sometimes shorter. John Cooper’s *Fun in a Barber Shop* was a skit.

Slapstick – A boisterous form of comedy marked by chases, collisions, and crude practical jokes. A literal description which comes from the use of a paddle made of two long and wide boards, hinged at one end, that would slap together when it struck someone, even lightly, to produce a much louder whacking sound than one board, like the later "Boing!" in cartoons. They were originally used by performers in pantomimes and farces. The word slapstick dates from about 1896, and slapstick style acting (sans sound) was a major part of the silent film era, for which Mack Sennett was so well known He developed demolition derby slapstick comedy, devising elaborate car chase scenes of complex timing with close calls and crashes, which has gone high tech today. The full phrase "slapstick comedy," dates from 1926.

Slow Burn – A kind of comedy "take" slowly catching on to something and reacting to it, sometimes in anger, or more accurately, mock anger, often by facial expression alone, or with a slow turn of the head.

Soap Opera – Also "Soap" A drama, typically performed as a serial on daytime radio and later television, or characterized by stock characters and situations, sentimentality, and melodrama, as the plot twists and turns and goes on slowly and forever. The name stems from such shows originally having been sponsored by soap companies aiming their wares at women at home.

Song-and-Dance Man – Just what it says, a vaudevillian who sang and danced, interlacing his dancing with occasional jokes, particularly in a team. In limited use in show biz, it has migrated to general use, mostly in a confrontation; "don't give me a song and dance" meaning "don't try to cover the mistake or distract me from the business at hand." Another term for distracting from the issue is "smoke and mirrors" from the days when magic lanterns – glass slides and projectors, used mirrors to reflect images onto smoke. The wavy smoke and moving mirror created motion from still images. The Chinese were the first we know of to do this.

Sound Stage – During the silent film era all anyone needed was an open air stage that got plenty of sunlight. Noise was not a problem. When talkies came on the scene, film makers, and later television producers, needed enormous, windowless buildings which insulated them from outside sounds of traffic and later on, airplanes. They also could control lighting and other environmental conditions.

Spiritualism – As used in this book, the belief that the dead communicate with the living, as through a medium.

Spoof – Nonsense; tomfoolery; [Tom has long been a name associated with foolishness] a hoax; a gentle satirical imitation; a light parody.

SRO – Abbreviation. Slang for **S**tanding **R**oom **O**nly, which meant that all the seats were sold out, a very desirable situation.

Stand-up Routine (Comic) – This meant that there was no other act on stage and that you were standing up, doing a talking act, usually with minimum props and no scenery. When ventriloquists used only one figure, they became a kind of standup act, even if seated, as many did.

Steal / Stole – To draw attention unexpectedly in (an entertainment), especially by being the outstanding performer: The program was great, but that hilarious ventriloquist act really stole the show.

Step on lines – Not the cracks of youthful superstition, but a rule which must be mastered by all professional performers. In the theater, in order for the audience to follow the plot and 'get' any jokes, every word and line of the script must be heard. To speak over the lines of another actor is an interruption called "stepping on their/my line." With very few exceptions, one must wait for the other actor to finish talking, a rule perfectly suited to a one-person show by a ventriloquist! These were especially well done by Alexandre, Fred Russell, Leonardo, and John Cooper.

Stock Player – Someone under contract to a studio and part of their "inventory" (stock) or selection of performers, as opposed to someone who does summer stock, performing in one or several of an inventory of successful plays.

Straight Man – The straight man sets up the jokes, the comic delivers the punch line for the payoff. The ventriloquist is usually the straight man and the figure, or the ventriloquial voice of an unseen character, usually delivers the punch line.

Subplot – A plot other than the main plot, that weaves in and out of the storyline. The ventriloquist team, Chuck and Bob, was a subplot on "Soap."

Summer Stock – Plays given in the summer that last for six to eight weeks, usually hitting one town a week.

Suspend Disbelief – After childhood, humans become skeptical as a survival tactic, and do not believe everything automatically. However, for the period of time that they are in the theater, they tacitly agree to suspend disbelief, so that they can enjoy the play and accept that the remote, beautiful island they are looking at is "real," rather than a construction on a stage in front of a sea of people. As audiences become more sophisticated, the special effects become more elaborate, to assist the jaded audience members in suspending disbelief.

Take – A reaction, usually comedic, to something that is done, or said. The slow burn is a classic take that is still going strong, and is usually used by the comic, but may also be used by the straightman. Also, a short scene or segment in a movie or videotaping.

Talkies – Motion Pictures with sound; an old slang term for talking pictures, found in old articles or used today by retro-writers.

Talking Woman – The female equivalent of a straight man. Gracie Allen started out giving straight lines to George Burns, but she got more laughs with her straight lines than he did with his punch lines and so he wisely switched roles with her and they zoomed to the top and stayed.

Talking Act – A comedy act that did not involve dancing, singing, juggling, magic, mime. etc. A ventriloquist act can be considered a talking act. The opposite of a "dumb act."

Toby mug [also toby] – A drinking mug, or stein, usually in the shape of a stout man wearing a large three-cornered hat. [After *Toby*, a nickname for *Tobias*.] A Talking Toby mug has a moveable jaw, but the talking is provided by the ventriloquist.

Top Banana – The lead comic in vaudeville. It still designates the featured comedian, but is losing ground. The second banana took a subordinate role, playing second fiddle, [see: Second Fiddle] to the top banana. Banana is considered, by many comedians, to be a funny word, hence a very funny person could be a top banana.

Trailer – The "short" footage that currently shows previews at the beginning, not trails at the end, of a feature film in order to build up interest in the next film. It is usually known as "previews of coming attractions." Leaders, at the beginning, and trailers at the end, were originally, and remain, short blank sections of film to protect the actual movie. The blank leaders at the beginning are used to thread the film into the innards of projector, and take the abuse of mechanical and operator handling, as does the trailer when the movie ended and was rewound. The trailer was originally where the promotional shorts went, like the credits which ran immediately before it and for which few people stayed anyway. Taking note of the lack of interest, the previews were soon moved to the front, where a captive audience would be awaiting, patiently or impatiently, the coming feature, but the name "trailer" stuck. The practice was continued on video cassette, but the FF>> button diminished its value somewhat, as did the refrigerator, and later the remote control, to the commercials whether broadcast live or recorded. A trailer is also the actors' on-set home-away-from-home for location shoots.

Trouper – Originally, a member of a theatrical company, usually a veteran actor or performer, now used in polite society to describe a reliable, often hard-working and usually uncomplaining person.

Turkey – A flop, be it movie, TV show, book, record or car that does not sell. (As opposed to a lemon, a car that does not work properly.) The Ford Edsel was surely a turkey but not a lemon.

Upstage – Originally a theatrical term meaning "to distract attention from (another performer) by moving upstage, (See: Olio) thus forcing the other performer to face away from the audience." Now used by the general public to refer to someone who draws attention to themselves or diverts attention or praise from someone else; to force out of the spotlight: *a vice president who repeatedly tries to upstage the president.*

Vaudeo – A blend word derived from **vaud**eville and vid**eo**. It was an early television term used to describe the transition of former vaudeville acts appearing on television, which itself was called "video," perhaps because of its similar sound to the familiar "radio." Vaudeo gave way to the variety show, which was popular at one time, but is now quite rare, or is considered to be a "special."

Vaudeville – A French term for America's version of English Music Hall which presented a program of short novelty acts of all kinds. Though originally it meant song, it became an umbrella term which included comedy acts, jugglers, acrobats, eccentric dancers, mimes, magicians, song-and-dance acts, and of course ventriloquists. While Vaudeville began before the 1800s, it evolved, with a major change around 1881, with Tony Pastor's efforts and faded away in the early days of silent movies and radio. Talkies killed it in the early 1930s. There is a revival, called New Vaudeville, sometimes presented as a family festival. Almost any variety show with several different types of short acts on one bill could be considered a form of vaudeville. Thus, there were many different claimants to be the first to use the term.

From the French, alteration of Old French *vaudevire*, *vaudeville*, earlier *vau* (pl. *vaux*) *de ville*, *vau de vire*, and in full: *chanson du Vau de Vire* = a song of the valley of Vire (a valley of northwest France, in Calvados, Normandy). The name is said to have been first given to occasional or topical light popular songs composed by Olivier Basselin, a fuller of Vire in the 15th c. Another less likely origin is sometimes offered: dialectal *vauder*, to go + *virer*, to turn, thus to take or do one's turn on the program. Sometimes a word fits several similar circumstances, which reinforce its use.

Vaudeville Circuits – Acts toured from city to city across the country to perform at theaters owned by a conglomerate, which was called a circuit. This was good for the act, because it provided steady work, usually one week at each location, and it was good for the producers, because they could create a solid schedule of top acts at a savings. Sometimes the conglomerate took advantage of the acts, so the performers created a union to deal with the abuse. A circuit could last a year, going from theater to theater in the various cities, usually by train, truck and bus. At the height of vaudeville there were various circuits which combined with each other. At one time two fellows, E. F. Albee and B. F. Keith, joined together to create Keith-Albee. There was also the Orpheum Vaudeville Circuit, and the Royal-Keith-Orpheum, which later became known as RKO and went into the movie business.

Vocal Cords – Either of two pairs of bands or folds of mucous membrane in the throat that project into the larynx. The lower pair vibrate when pulled together and when air is passed up from the lungs, thereby producing vocal sounds. The upper, thicker pair are not involved in voice production, but are involved in ventricular phonation.

Western – A novel, film, television or radio program about frontier life in the American West. During the 1950s there were dozens of Westerns on radio and television. Thus "Buffalo Bob" and Howdy Doody and friends were western oriented. During the 1990s, there are none on the

radio and only a few on TV, including the recent *Dr. Quinn Medicine Woman*, canceled and now in reruns as are those of *Little House on the Prairie*, and some channels that are retro. There are few new movies with western themes and most have treated the American Indian in negative stereotypes. *Dances With Wolves* was one of few movies to portray Native Americans in an honest way.

NOTES

1. Hertz, Dr J H, editor, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*. Second Edition, Seventh Impression. Soncino Press, London, Great Britain, 1960, note 11, p. 827.
2. Elizabethan theater and culture of the day had constant references to magic, witchcraft and sorcery. Scot, an educated man who attended college, but left without a degree, had family money and much leisure time to read widely. He preferred obscure books on many unusual subjects and was a perceptive skeptic who, over the years, collected notes, made observations and careful analyses. Quite learned, he was appointed a Justice of the Peace for a time. He had also seen old, poor, wretched, innocent people condemned as 'witches' and put to death. To help prevent such prejudice and panic based killings, he carefully compiled his notes and, in 1584 published his work. The word 'discovery' in the title, with the original quaint spelling, *The Discouerie of VVitchcraft* meant 'un' covery or revelation. The book was an exposé. It was intended to cast light and knowledge on a murky subject in order for judges, lawyers and jurors to understand that the accused were simply charlatans or, more often, actually innocent victims of circumstance. Some who talked to themselves were old and demented. Others who talked and created voices were simply ventriloquists. It did not stop executions upon publication. But it was a hot item. Copies of it were burned. Scot was truly an enlightened human being who started the ball rolling. He was way ahead of his time.
3. Quoted in: Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, *The Morning of the Magicians.* New York: Avon Books, 1971
4. Recent skeletal finds on Indian land are raising serious questions as to who was first on the continent of North America. Major legal, religious, governmental, political and scientific differences need to be settled before it can be determined.
5. Ritchard, Dan with Kathleen Moloney. *Ventriloquism for the Total Dummy*. Random House - Villard, New York, 1987, p. 6.
6. The uniqueness of ventricular phonation is, however, also accompanied by a lack of the gag reflex, which prevents foods and liquids from going into the trachea and lungs instead of the stomach. Therefore such a natural process as proper swallowing must be learned. This and other phonation disorders and their remediation in children and adults are a part of the field of speech pathology. Studies have shown that afflicted people can produce the sound at will, which is raspy, and use it to **speak without using their vocal cords**, though the words are formed by normal means, with lips and tongue. They have been studied to see if the technique can be taught to others, specifically throat cancer victims who have had their vocal cords removed. In this aspect, the goal is similar to, but alas, has proven far more elusive than, Esophageal (Belching) Speech, or in fact, real ventriloquism!
7. The word echo was from the name *Echo,* the nymph whom Greek mythology associates with the interesting phenomenon of echoes. According to one version of her story, the god Pan, who was hopelessly in love with her, forced shepherds to tear here to pieces. Those pieces of Echo were hidden in the ground, and still respond to Pan's frenzied cries, producing the phenomena known as echoes. A second version of her tale has it that Echo distracted Hera from observing Zeus's infidelities. As a penalty, she lost all power of speech, except the ability to reply. This defect lost her the love of Narcissus, which caused Echo to pine away until only her voice remained, and only to reply as a copy. There are several variations of the legend, but the theme is the same: All that remained of poor Echo was her voice, and only the ability to speak when spoken to. Because echoes come from distant locations which often difficult to pinpoint, it seemed to fit the apparent movement of voices which is part of the aural illusion we call ventriloquism.
8. "Geoffrey Chaucer should perhaps receive honor as the real Saint Valentine. Although reference books abound with mention of Roman festivals from which Valentine's Day—the day for lovers—may be derived, Jack B. Oruch has shown that no evidence exists to support these connections and that Chaucer is most likely the first to link the saint's day with the custom of choosing sweethearts. No link between the day and lovers exists before the time of Chaucer and

several literary contemporaries who also mention it, but after them the link becomes widespread, a circumstance that makes it seem likely that Chaucer, the most imaginative of the group, invented the tradition. The fullest and perhaps earliest description of the tradition occurs in Chaucer's *Parlement of Foules*, composed around 1380, which takes place "on Seynt Valentynes day,/Whan every foul cometh there to chese [choose] his make [mate]." American Heritage Dictionary

9. Cockton, Henry. *The Life and Adventures of Valentine Vox the Ventriloquist*. 1840. From the back cover.

10. Baum, L. Frank. *The Wizard of Oz*. Chicago, 1900, chapter 55.

11. Olin, Charles, *Ventriloquism*. Philadelphia: Penn Publishing, 1906, p. 79.

12. "Toby jug. A small jug in the form of a squat old man in 18th-century dress, wearing a three-cornered hat, one corner of which forms the lip. The name comes from a poem (1761) about one "Toby Philpot", adapted from the Latin by Francis Fawkes; and the design of the jug from a print sold by Carrington Bowles, a London print-seller, to Ralph Wood, the potter, who turned out a great number of Toby Jugs." *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, London: Cumberland House, 1993.

13. Mulholland, John. *Quicker Than The Eye, The Magic and Magicians of the United States*. First Edition Indianapolis Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1931. p. 127.

14. Anthropologists point out that these rituals, in fact, came from our northern neighbors, the Eskimos, and the person who conducted the ritual was called a "*shaman*." Through migration, some parts of *shamanism*, including ventriloquism, drifted down to the various tribes living on the land which was later called America, and to the people called Indians. Because many of these practitioners used herbs, and roots, to cure sickness, the white man called the Indian version of the *shaman*, a "medicine man."

15. Spencer, Robert, Jesse D. Jennings, et al. *The Native Americans.* New York: Harper and Row, 1965, p. 152. Professor of Anthropology, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

16. The facts were found in Congregation Church Records. In addition, Ben Franklin, an admitted, and an historically established, womanizer, was seventy-four years old at the time of Potter's birth and was known to have been in Europe for at least nine months before Potter was born. It has also been determined that Richard Potter must have been conceived fifteen years after the death of Sir Frankland himself.

17. The brothers were both magicians, but John was also a ventriloquist. They were often competitors.

18. He would remain proud of his affiliation and active in the organization. Less than a month later, and all in one day, on December 3, he proudly received his first three degrees.

19. Seligmann, Kurt, *Magic, Supernaturalism and Religion* New York: Pantheon Books, A Division of Random House, 1948, p. 262

20. Congregation Church Records

21. *The Conjurer's Journal*, Frances L. Shine, New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1978. Very loosely based upon Potter's life.

22. Except where noted, most of the information on Blitz comes from: Blitz, Signor. *Fifty Years in the Magic Circle*. San Francisco: Belknap and Bliss, A.I. Bankcroft and Co., 1871

23. Parker, John F., State Senator. "*If Elected, I Promise*. . .," Doubleday and Company, Garden City, New York, 1960. p. 58

24. *Magic* Oct. 1901 Vol. II, No. 1 p. 1 Elis Stanton, ed.

25. Ibid.

26. Martin Van Buren, 1782-1862. The eighth President of the United States (1837-1841). A powerful Democrat from New York, he served in the U.S. Senate (1821-1828), as secretary of state (1829-1831), and as Vice President (1833-1837) under Andrew Jackson before being elected President in 1836. It was he who helped Alexandre Vattemare with the International System of Exchanges. Van Buren unsuccessfully sought reelection in 1840 and 1848.

Millard Fillmore, 1800-1874. The 13th President of the United States (1850-1853), who

succeeded to office after the death of Zachary Taylor. He struggled to keep the nation unified but lost the support of his Whig Party by attempting to enforce the Fugitive Slave Act in the North.

Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1865. The 16th President of the United States (1861-1865), who led the Union during the Civil War and emancipated slaves in the South (1863). He was assassinated shortly after the end of the war by John Wilkes Booth.

27. *Ventriloquism Explained: and Juggler's Tricks Exposed*, Published Anonymously, Amherst Massachusetts.
28. However, there was, for a time, a ban on the use of spotlights and a limit of two bows for the performer!
29. The railroad barons were frustrated by the numerous irregular time schedules of individual towns and cities. They needed efficiency and safety. To unify their railroad timetables they demanded, and established, in1883, the four standard time zones that we have to this day.
30. "Vernon's Sight Gone, But the Clever Ventriloquist Scores as Usual". *The Billboard* Feb 12, 1921, p. 12
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ben Hecht was a writer, producer, director, and actor. He wrote over one hundred books and screenplays combined, many of which did not list him in the credits. He is best known for:

Kiss of Death (1995) (1947 screenplay)
Notorious (1992) (TV) (story)
Switching Channels (1988) (play The Front Page)
Front Page, The (1974) (play)
Gaily, Gaily (1969) (novel)
Miracle of the Bells, The (1948)
Notorious (1946)
... a.k.a. Alfred Hitchcock's Notorious (1946)
Spellbound (1945)
... a.k.a. Alfred Hitchcock's Spellbound (1945)
His Girl Friday (1940) (play The Front Page)
Goldwyn Follies, The (1938)
Once in a Blue Moon (1936)
Scarface (1932)

34. Jarman, Rufus. "Secrets of the Talking Dummies," *Saturday Evening Post*, May 9, 1953, p. 80.
35. Twice-told Tales - Egotism, or, The Bosom Serpent, from the unpublished "Allegories of the Heart" by Nathaniel Hawthorne, 1843.
36. "Moving Picture World" Vol. 10 Oct.-Dec. 1911, p. 830
37. Bergen appeared in many movies and on some television shows.

Muppet Movie, The (1979) (Himself)
Won Ton Ton, the Dog Who Saved Hollywood (1976) (Professor Quicksand)
Homecoming: A Christmas Story, The (1971) (TV) (Grandpa Walton) pilot episode
Phynx, The (1970)
Rogues' Gallery (1968)
Don't Make Waves (1967) (Madame Lavinia, phony spiritualist)
One Way Wahine (1965) (Sweeney)
Hanged Man, The (1964) (TV) (Hotel Clerk)
Frances Langford Presents (1959) TV Series
Do You Trust Your Wife (1956) TV Series
Captain China (1949) (Mr. Haasvelt)
I Remember Mama (1948) (Mr. Thorkelson)

Fun and Fancy Free (1947)
Song of the Open Road (1944)
Show Business at War (1943)
Stage Door Canteen (1943)
Here We Go Again (1942)
Look Who's Laughing (1941)
Charlie McCarthy, Detective (1939)
You Can't Cheat an Honest Man (1939) (The Great Edgar)
Goldwyn Follies, The (1938)
Hollywood Handicap (1938) (uncredited)
Letter of Introduction (1938)
Unusual Occupations (1938)
Every Day's a Holiday (1937)
Double Talk (1936)
Africa Speaks English (1935)
All-American Drawback (1935)
Donkey Business (1935)
Eyes Have It, The (1935)
Free and Easy (1935)
Nut Guilty (1935)
Office Scandal (1935)
Operation, The (1935)
Two Boobs in a Balloon (1934)
At the Races (1934)

TV guest appearances
Muppet Show, The (1976)
Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea (1964) playing "Dr. Arthur Kenner" in episode: "Fear-Makers, The" 9/28/1964
Hour Glass (1946) 11/14/1946

38. This has nothing to do with a 1936 film of the same name.
39. Brooks, Tim and Earle March *The Prime Time Encyclopedia*, Balantine Books, New York, 1979, p. 483
40. While the movie, *The Invisible Man*, starring Claude Raines in the title role, had been made in 1933, the inspiration for the skit may have been the novel of the same name published in 1952. A, then unknown, black writer, Ralph Waldo Ellison wrote his highly acclaimed novel *The Invisible Man* about poor black people being ignored by the society around them who pretend they are not there. It received high praise from every reviewer and in 1953 Ellison's *Invisible Man* won a prestigious National Book Award for Fiction. Suddenly both the author and the book were prominently in the public eye.
41. Movie producers later feared the home video recorder when it first appeared. Now they look forward to the revenue from tape and DVD sales, even though anyone can record the movie during a broadcast, or make a copy.
42. Perhaps the choice of subtitle was a reference to his past adventures as Nicholas Marie Vattemare, man of many trades who spent many years trying to "find himself."
43. To create this revolutionary new idea in theater, he cleverly capitalized on accepted theatrical techniques. One standard ploy is to use imaginary areas offstage to expand the scope of the 'set'. Thus, one may have an elaborate indoor parlor scene and, without any props or scenery, convey the impression of a large mansion with many rooms and a large front lawn by looking out of a window, or calling up a flight of stairs that doesn't really go anywhere.
The other is more than a technique, it is a rule which must be mastered by all professional performers. In the theater, in order for the audience to follow the plot and/or 'get' any jokes, it

is essential for everyone to hear every word of the script. Therefore, with very few exceptions, a cardinal rule is: “never step on someone’s lines.” This means wait for the other actor to finish talking. Since only one person speaks at a time, it is perfectly suited to a one-person show by a ventriloquist!
44. It is often attributed to Shakespeare, though it is actually an abbreviated paraphrase from Shakespeare’s Othello Act III, Scene 3.
45. Taylor, Robert Lewis, *W. C. Fields His Follies and Fortunes*, Doubleday and Company, Inc. Garden City, New York 1949. p. 309
46. “Transformation in African Verbal Art: Voice, Speech, Language” in the *Journal of American Folklore* abstract. 109(432): 178-192, 1996
47. The Studio was founded by Fred Maher in Grosse Point Farms Michigan, in 1934 and moved to Detroit, Michigan in 1942. Detweiler bought it in 1969 and moved its operations to Littleton.
48. Spencer, Robert, Jesse D. Jennings, et al. *The Native Americans*, New York: Harper and Row, 1965, p. 152.
49. Ibid. p. 153.
50. Leacock, Eleanor Burke, editor and Nancy Oestreich Lurie, *North American Indians in Historical Perspective*, Random House, New York, 1971, p. 369.
51. *The Turkey Vulture Society’s Newsletter* [TVS] Volume 4, Issue 2, May-September, 1997
52. Morton, Eugene S., and Jake Page. *Animal Talk - Science and the Voices of Nature*. New York: Random House, 1992, p. 56. The wavelength of the sound could prevent animals from hearing it, depending upon the distance between their ears, in small animals of course.
53. Ibid. pp. 233-234
54. The PIG of KNOWLEDGE!!
To be wise observe; for observation is the source of wisdom.
THE EXPOSITOR;
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MANY MYSTERIES UNRAVELLED.
DELINEATED In a Series of Letters, between a Friend and his Correspondent. COMPRISING THE LEARNED PIG, INVISIBLE LADY AND ACOUSTIC TEMPLE, PHILOSOPHICAL SWAN, PENETRATING SPY GLASSES, OPTICAL AND MAGNETIC, AND Various other Curiosities on similar Principles: ALSO, A few of the most wonderful Feats as performed by the Art of Legerdemain: WITH Some Reflections on Ventriloquism.
By WILLIAM FREDERICK PINCHBECK.
Boston: PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR. 1805.

Pinchbeck means: an alloy of zinc and copper used as imitation gold. 2. A cheap imitation.- made of pinchbeck. also, Imitation; spurious. [After Christopher Pinchbeck (1670?-1732), English watchmaker.]
55. “Hoover, The Seal That Talks like A Man,” *Reader’s Digest* March, 1984 pp. 74-78
56. Ibid. (full story)
Also, slight variant on some points in Morton, Eugene S. *Animal Talk* pp. 231-233. This takes a less enthusiastic view than the *Reader’s Digest*.
57. “Then the LORD opened the donkey's mouth, and she said to Balaam, “What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?” Numbers XXII,28. Hertz wrote a half-page on this in Note, 20, p. 671. His extensive analysis points out that this verse has many inconsistencies, and that, for over a thousand years there have been many interpretations. Among them, that it was a dream, or that it was an interpretation of the actions of the ass, or maybe an expression of Balaam’s conscience, rather than the literal interpretation that it was actual speech.
58. Fahey, Tom. *The Joys of Jargon*. Barron’s Educational Series, Inc., Hauppaugue, New York, 1990, p. 120.

Whatever the form or forum, ventriloquism will remain to entertain, as long as there is one voice around to make a sound, and another to laugh at it... and wonder.

Clifford Guest, Edgar Bergen with talking hand, Stan Burns and Jimmy Nelson visit after Bergen's show at the Waldorf Astoria, 1957. Photo courtesy Jimmy Nelson.

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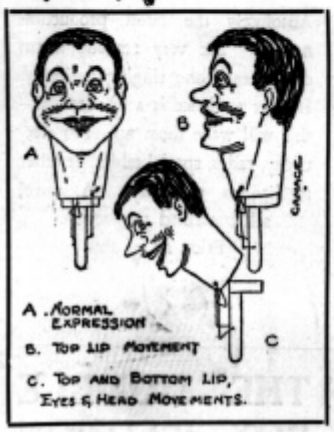

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Introducing RICKIE-TIK

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The Smartest Looking, the most Up-To-Date Ventriloquial Creation of the Internationally Famous FRANK MARSHALL.

HERE IS A REAL PROFESSIONAL FIGURE FOR THE BEGINNER IN VENTRILOQUISM

Easy to manipulate. Head can be turned and made to nod. In fact every movement that one may desire. Famous Marshall Ventriloquial Mouth Movement, Glass Eyes, Real Hair Wig, Modern Wardrobe. RICKIE-TIK is 34 inches Tall.

RICKIE-TIK Is NOT A TOY !

His head can be turned and made to nod in a most life-like manner. Head and Hands are Carved of Wood. Construction, Craftsmanship and Finish are all the same High Marshall Standards. His Face and Hands are Painted in Natural Colors from our own special secret formulas.

BUY A MARSHALL FIGURE TODAY— SO YOU WON'T BE DISAPPOINTED TOMORROW.

FRANK MARSHALL has spent a life-time in this field, making Ventriloquial Figures for these Nationally known names, who are all using... Marshall Figures: EDGAR BERGEN, JIMMY NELSON, PAUL WINCHELL, CLIFFORD GUEST, BOB McELROY, BOB KING, HANK SIEMON, ROSALEE, MAX TERHUNE, BILL SWEENEY, WALTER WALTERS, STANLEY BURNS, LES MARSHALL, EDDIE GARSON, GREAT LESTER, and many others.

Included with the purchase of RICKIE-TIK is a complete course of practical Ventriloquism as well as handy carrying case.

PRICE ONLY **$125.00**

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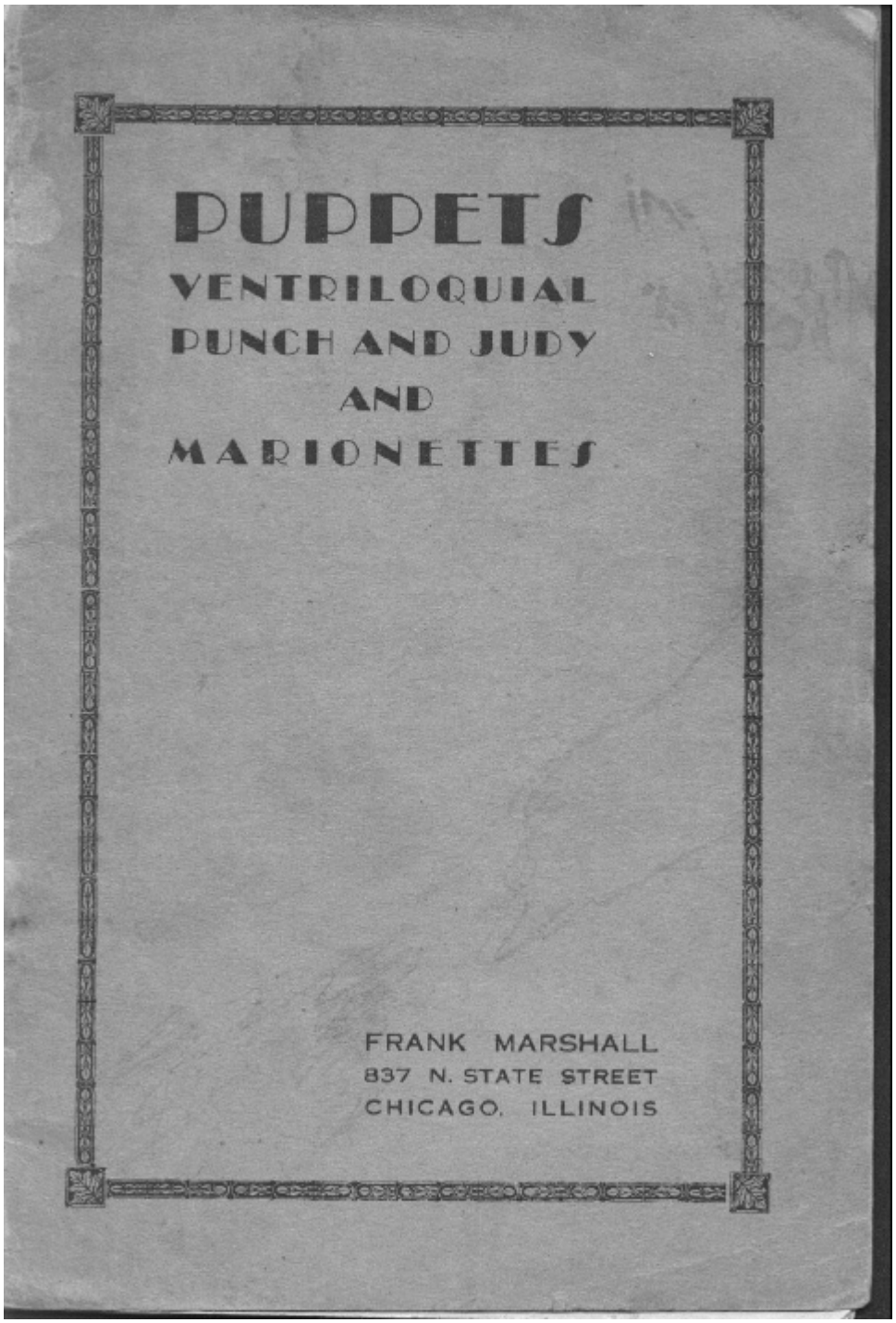

¶ Today ***Marshall Hand Carved Wood Figures*** **stand apart from the ordinary and have become a Standard. They are acclaimed throughout the Entertainment World as leaders in quality and craftsmanship. Why?**

¶ **The pride of achievement is the incentive for making** ***Marshall Figures*** **the Acme of Perfection.**

¶ **This catalogue with its descriptions and illustrations will serve as a ready reference and will assist you in ordering approved** ***Marshall Figures.***

Frank Marshall

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Frank Marshall

TALKING FIGURES

History by PAUL MCPHARLIN

WE may pass a man in the street every day without looking at him. But if somebody points him out to us as a descendant of a Mayflower settler, or of one of the early presidents of the United States, we may observe him sharply, and see quite a bit in him. So it is with those wooden figures, the puppets in a Punch and Judy show, or on the knee of a ventriloquist. We take them very much for granted. Who invented them? Somebody who lived in Plymouth, Massachusetts, about 1620? No! for they existed long before that. Dates and places are difficult to fix, puppets were first conceived so long ago.

The primitive man who hit upon the trick of speaking by emitting air from his lungs slowly through the glottis, without perceptible movement of his lips or jaws, may well have mystified his companions. They were ready to believe that a tree, or a rock, or any other strange object nearby, was causing the words. The ventriloquist (from the Latin venter, belly, and loqui, past participle of the verb, to speak), with his magic power, became identified with spirits and demons, a creator of awe among his fellow mortals. When he set up as priest, intermediary between man and spirits, he used his ventriloquial skill in causing images of these spirits to speak. The images he might make with moving heads and lips—the first puppets—so that the words might all the more seem to issue from their throats.

We have records that such images were used in ancient Egypt and Greece at least four centuries before the Christian era. They belonged in the temples, however; they fascinated because they spoke prophecies and divine judgments.

A century or two later, string-puppets (more of the kind we know) and shadow-puppets of the translucent parchment, in human form, came to be used in Greece and China respectively. At first considered supernatural when they spoke, these little figures in time began to be considered less seriously, as they learned to joke and perform antics and be human. They sang and danced, with short memory of their magic origin. The two basic types of puppets, the shadow from China and the string, or hand-operated figures from Greece, began to travel also. The first came west, and arrived in Europe in the eighteenth century as Chinese Shadows. The second went eastward, and got to China and Japan somewhat sooner, for they have been known in these countries, and even in Alaska (which is thought to have been settled by Asiatics) for centuries.

When puppets became dramatic performers, and their operator was hidden behind his miniature stage, he had no need of ventriloquism; but the ancient art was preserved by the manipulator who made no use of scene or stage, and who conversed with the lay-figure seated before him.

In the dark church of the middle ages, moving perhaps only as the flickering candles caught the gold embroideries of their garment, stood little figures to portray scenes from biblical lore. In the center would be the sweet heroine, Mary—who gives her name to marionettes.

So when next you see Punch and Judy, or the ventriloquist's smart boy, chattering thoughtlessly away, look closely, and you may be able to detect a trace of those dim ancestors who filled with awe the worshipper by the Nile, or the Emperor in his Asiatic palace, or the medieval pilgrim.

As in the past, so today, figures are used for entertaining. The modern figure is very much different from those used in the past. Figures today must be natural in appearance and mechanically perfect.

Marshall figures incorporate these features and for years have been the standard and used by all leading professionals.

A Few of the Leading Professionals Using Our Figures

Ben Badley
Edgar Bergen
Omar Bey
Leo Bill
Robert Brooking
Chicago Civic Opera Co.
Lucelle Elmore
Hugh Emmet
Everett & Quigley
Wm. Ebbs
Lillian Faulkner
Harry Ferris
Ned Fraily
Frank Gaby
Doc George
Lon Chaney
Ray Conlin
D. B. Coleman
McCormick and Wallace
Ray and Ann Raymond
Leon Toone and Leona Trovolo
Harry and Mildred Otto
Jerry Gould
Ed Grant
Dr. Gentely
Prof. Holland
J. H. Heany
Jack King
Great Lester
Grant Livermore
Lorraine
S. LeCourt
Lamb's Marionettes
Morgan and Lake
Morin and Gale
Judson Marshall
P. J. Moloney
Silent Mora
Les Nichols
Bob Neller
Hall Parr
Jack Poole
Parish and Peru
Stanley Philps
W. "Bill" Zeilner
Fred Russell
Alf Rippon
Philep Reye
Lester Rizek
Adam Ross
Harry Rose
Kenneth Spencer
Al Silver
W. T. Schorb
E. Steward
Ed Tenny
Max Terhune
Don Taylor
Ray Turner
Charle Ulrick
Vox and Walter
Walter Walters
W. Winter
George F. Wilson
Vernon
Len Vintus
Dave Rafael

Herr Louie the Weasel and his Hungry Five Band

CONSTRUCTION OF VENTRILOQUIAL FIGURES

Ventriloquial heads are hand-carved of light weight wood, hollowed out and made in two sections; arranged so as to easily taken apart. This feature facilitates adding various effects whenever desired.

Mechanical Movements

The most important requirements of the figure are the mechanical movements of the head and mouth. This assures success to the performer and his act. Fullest confidence in the proper response of the manipulation of the figure is necessary.

The lower jaw or mouth is so constructed that it moves in its own groove. This elimina the unnatural sinking in effect so common when kid leather is used. The *Marshall Ventriloquial Movable Mouth* is not a leather movement. This is a valuable asset for close work such as club and drawing room entertainment.

Mouth opens real wide, and jaw movement is effective and can be seen from any part of the theatre.

Controls

Mouth is controlled by lever or ring. (When ordering please state which control is desired.) The cords that control mouth movement, as well as other effects, runs through the rod and not along side of it.

Head is attached to a wood rod and can be turned in any direction desired. Illustration No. V21 shows natural facial expression of the face when mouth is open. There is no distortion. This is one of the many features why all leading professionals use and indorse the *Marshall Figures*.

Bodies, arms and legs are naturally shaped and proportioned.

Heads are carved of wood, well done, and painted in natural colors.

Facial Effects and Paints

Each head is individually carved as to character and painted (Lester formula) in natural colors to bring out every detail of that character. Nothing is overlooked. When completed the effect is life-like and real. Not just a block of wood.

Lester Formula is an oil paint that does not have that shiny reflection so annoying to an audience. Can be washed whenever soiled without injury to finish.

Wigs

Crepe hair (very natural in appearance) wigs are used and can be supplied in any color desired.

Natural hair wigs made in any style or color.

Individual Requirements and Ideas

We will gladly co-operate with you in developing your ideas as to special characters and effects best suited for your individual needs. We are equipped mechanically and artistically to do this for you. Just forward your sketch or write your idea as plain as possible and we will do the rest. Your plans, sketches and ideas will be kept strictly confidential.

Illustrated above are three standard size knee ventriloquial figures.

No. V1—"Wee Willy"—The smallest of the knee figures, measures 30 inches in height. This ventriloquial figure is especially designed for the young fellow. Complete with movable mouth, turning head, wig, costumed in cloth suit as illustrated. 22.50

No. V2—Same as No. V1 only costumed in plain suit. 22.50

No. V3—"Fresh Kid"—This size figure is best adapted for the drawing room entertainer. Height of figure 36 inches. Complete with movable mouth, turning head, wig, costumed in plain suit as illustrated. (When plain suit is specified style is the same as illustrated on figure No. V3.) 27.50

No. V4—"Fresh Kid"—(PS)—This size is used in theatres and large halls. Height 42 inches. Complete with movable mouth, turning head, wig, costumed in cloth suit as illustrated. 37.00

No. V5—Same as No. V4 only costumed in plain suit. 32.50

NOTE—All figures marked (PS) are professional size figures and measure 42 inches in height.

No. V6—"Nosey"—(PS)—A smart effect character that will "click" with any audience. Complete with movable mouth, turning head, wig, and costumed in blue serge suit as illustrated. 45.00

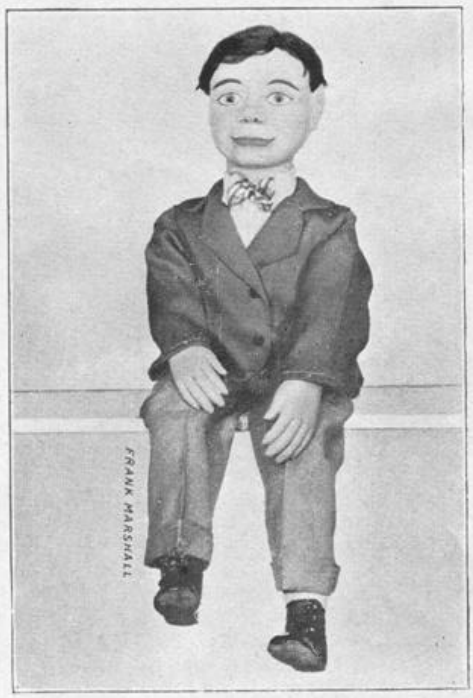
No. V7—Same as No. V6 only costumed in Bell Boy uniform. 50.00

No. V8—Same as No. V6 only costumed in plain suit. 37.50

No. V9—"Mickey"—(PS)—Irish character. Complete with movable mouth, turning head, wig, costumed in cloth suit as illustrated. 40.00

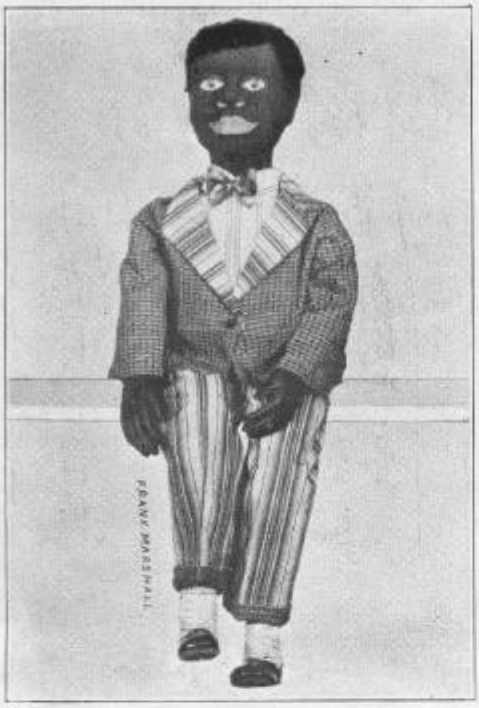
No. V10—Same as No. V9 only costumed in plain suit. 35.

No. V11—Same as No. V9 only in the 36-inch size and costumed in plain suit. 27.50



No. V12—"Girl"—(P S)—Attractive and well featured, movable mouth, turning head, wig of natural hair, neatly dressed as illustrated. 42.00

No. V13—"Tuffy"—(PS)—A tough yet comical expression that will appeal to everyone. Large ears, movable mouth, turning head, wig, costumed in sweater, long trousers, derby as illustrated. 50.



No. V14—"Sambo"—(PS)—A real negro character with those beady eyes, flat nose, large lips, movable mouth, kinky hair wig, turning head, costumed in loud colored suit as illustrated. 37.50

No. V15—Same as No. V14 only costumed in Plantation style. 37.50

No. V16—Same as No. V14 only costumed in plain suit. 32.50

No. V17—Same as No. V14 but in the 36-inch size and costumed in plain suit. 27.50

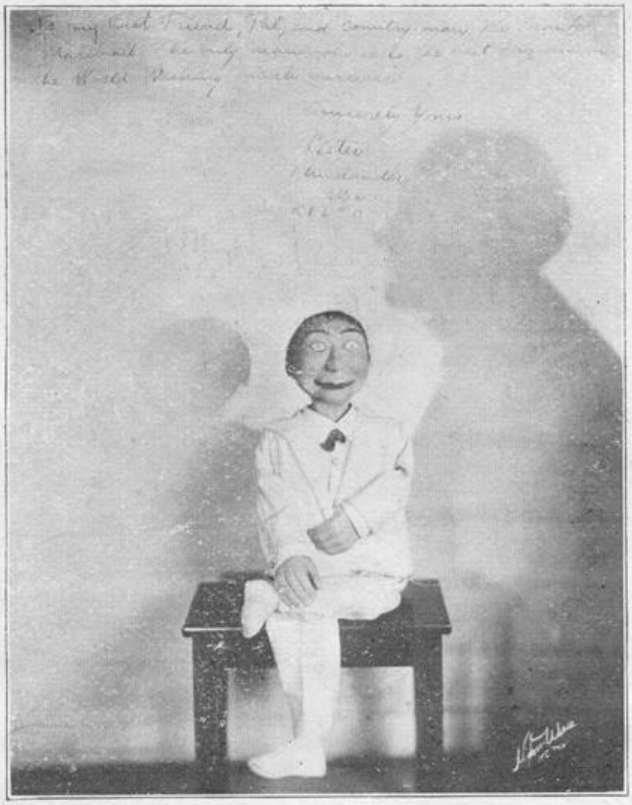
No. V18—"Sailor"—(PS)—A typical character of a sailor. Complete with movable mouth, turning head, wig, costumed in neat sailor suit as illustrated. 41.50

No. V19—Same as No. V18 but in "bare foot" style; feet are naturally carved of wood and painted in natural color. 45.00

No. V20—Same as No. V18 only costumed in plain suit. 35.

No. V21 — "Saucy Kid"— (PS)—Snappy character of young boy. Complete with movable mouth, turning head, wig, costumed in neat suit as illustrated. 35

No. V22—"Girl" — A very pleasant figure of a girl. The facial effect is somewhat saucy which helps get more laughs. Complete with movable mouth, turning head, natural hair wig, well dressed as illustrated. This figure is 38 inches high. 42



A Tribute From The Great Lester

Our ventriloquial department is under the direction of Mr. Lester which means double assurance for your every ventriloquial need.

Appointments for professional instructions in the art of ventriloquism are available. For further information write this office.

Through the courtesy of Mr. Lester we are authorized to furnish genuine replica of his world-renowned ventriloquial character—which is illustrated on this page. **No. V23.** O.A.

Beginner's Ventriloquial Outfit

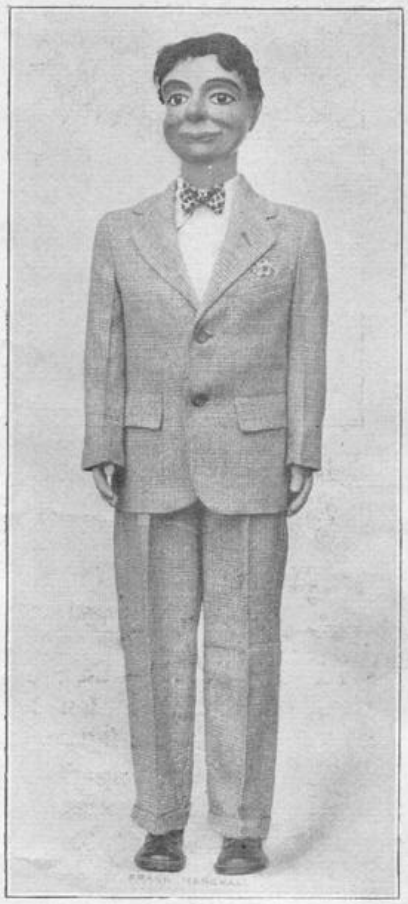
Positively the most original method ever offered to the ventriloquial student. Outfit consists of a special practice ventriloquial figure.

Illustrated instructions that teach every angle of the art.

This new method is highly indorsed by the entire profession.

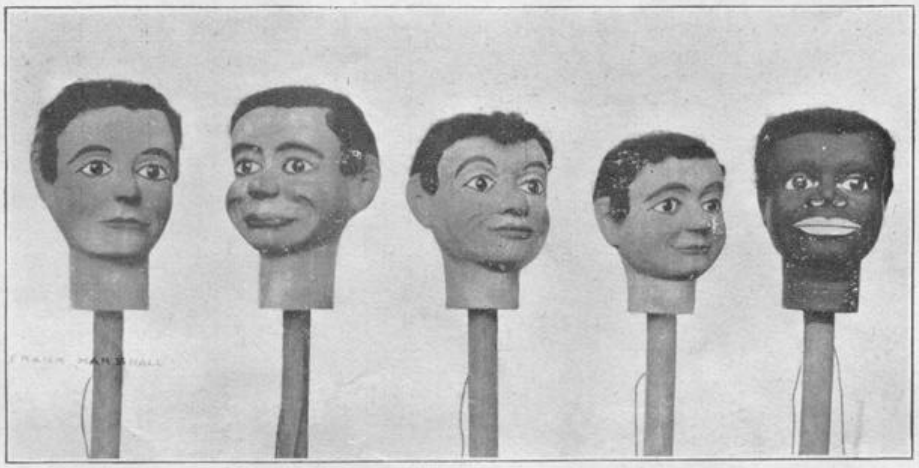
Further details and particulars forwarded on request.

No. WV24—Walking Ventriloquial Figures are a sensation. *Marshall* Walking Figures are the most natural in action and appearance. They are practical and built portable. Packs into small carrying case. Figure walks by simply catching his hand and walking along with it. When figure is walking mouth is manipulated by special control from the figure's hand. This permits conversation between performer and figure while walking. All movements are controlled from inside of body when not walking. Complete with movable mouth, turning head, wig, costumed in neat suit as illustrated and packed in fiber carrying case. 125.



No. PV25—"Pocket Figure"—A ventriloquial figure small enough to carry in your pocket, yet made like the regular professional ventriloquial figure. Complete with movable mouth, turning head, wig, costumed as illustrated.

15



VH26 **VH27** **VH28** **VH29** **VH30**

19.50 21.50 18.50 16. 17.50

Ventriloquial Heads

Heads for Ventriloquist figures complete with movable mouth, wig, wood rod, painted in natural colors. Ready to fit into body.

No. VH26—Professional size head. No. VH27—Professional size head. No. VH28—Same as used on our 36-inch size figure. No. VH 29—Same as used on our 30-inch size figure. No. VH30—Same as used on our 36-inch size figure.

Heads from any figure illustrated in catalogue can be procured. Also many other characters. Write us about your needs.

No. V31—Not illustrated. Old Man and Old Lady Figures.

Hands for ventriloquial figures. Carved of wood same as illustrated. Painted in natural colors.

No. H32—For life size figure. 6.50

No. H33—For professional size figure. 5.50

No. H34—For 36-inch size figure. 4.50

No. V35—For 30-inch size figure. 4.50

Talking Hands

NO. TH36 ILLUSTRATION ON PAGE 20

7.50 per

Install One or More of These Laugh Getting Extra Effects

It will repay you many times in bigger and better laughs.

Extra effects described and listed below can be installed in any ventriloquial head we make. Every effect is natural in appearance and mechanically perfect.

No. X37—WINKING EYELIDS. Eyelids close over outside of eye.

No. X38—WINKING EYEBALLS. Eyeballs turn on inside of head.

No. X39—COCKEYES. Both eyes roll into center for very funny effect.

No. X40—ROLLING EYES. Eyes roll from center to corner of eye sockets.

No. X41—ROLLING EYES WITH ONE WINKING EYE (in same head). When one winking eye or eyelid is wanted state which eye. Also direction of roll.

No. X42—RAISING EYEBROWS. Both eyebrows raise for a very comical effect.

No. X43—SMOKING EFFECT FOR CIGARETTE.

No. X44—SMOKING EFFECT FOR PIPE OR CIGAR. Please state which.

No. X45—CRYING EFFECT. In this effect figure cries water from corner eye ducts.

No. X46—SPITTING EFFECT. Figure spits wide spray of water from mouth.

No. X47—LAUGHING EFFECT. The upper lip raises into a smile showing a row of pearly white teeth in life fashion.

No. X48—PORCELAIN TEETH, upper and lower.

No. X49—PUCKERING LIPS. If your figure whistles this is the effect you have been waiting for. Both upper and lower lips form a pucker which is what you need for that perfect effect. (Does not interfere with movement of mouth.)

No. X50—FLAPPING EARS. Very comical. Both ears.

No. X51—LUMINOUS NOSE. Nose lights up when desired.

No. X52—TONGUE. Tongue projects several inches out of mouth.

No. X53—CROSSING KNEE. For knee figure only.

No. X54—SALUTING ARM. Arm raises for a salute.

No. X55—FRIGHT WIG ATTACHMENT. Wig raises as when frightened. Crepe hair.

No. X56—FRIGHT WIG ATTACHMENT. Natural hair.

No. X57—PNEUMATIC MOUTH CONTROL FOR DISTANCE WORK. With this control the mouth of a ventriloquial figure can be manipulated up to a distance of 25 feet. Reliable and practical. Installed complete in new head with six feet of tubing.

No. X58—TUBING FOR PNEUMATIC MOUTH CONTROL.

No. X59—COLOR CHANGING NECKTIE. Tie changes color when desired.

No. X60—COLOR CHANGING HANDKERCHIEF. In this effect handkerchief in his breast pocket of coat or shirt. Same changes color when desired.

No. G61—DRINKING GLASS. Do you do the Drinking Trick? If so here is the finest glass made to help you do it better. A full size glass that holds only about one ounce of liquid.

No. VD62—Dialogue for ventriloquist and boy figure.
No. VD63—Dialogue for ventriloquist and boy figure.
No. VD64—Dialogue for ventriloquist and boy figure.
No. VD65—Dialogue for ventriloquist and boy figure.
No. VD66—Dialogue for ventriloquist and girl figure.
No. VD67—Dialogue for ventriloquist and colored boy figure.
No. VD68—Dialogue for ventriloquist and boy and girl figures.

We Also Write Special Material

Carrying cases well made of fiber.

No. CC69—For professional knee figure.
No. CC70—For 36-inch size knee figure.
No. CC71—For 30-inch size knee figure.

Other sizes made to order.

No. PK72—PAINT KIT. For those who wish to repaint their own puppets and figures. Kit complete with flesh, red, black and white colored paint and set of three brushes.

COSTUMES AND UNIFORMS MADE TO ORDER.

JEWELRY, NOVELTIES, ETC.

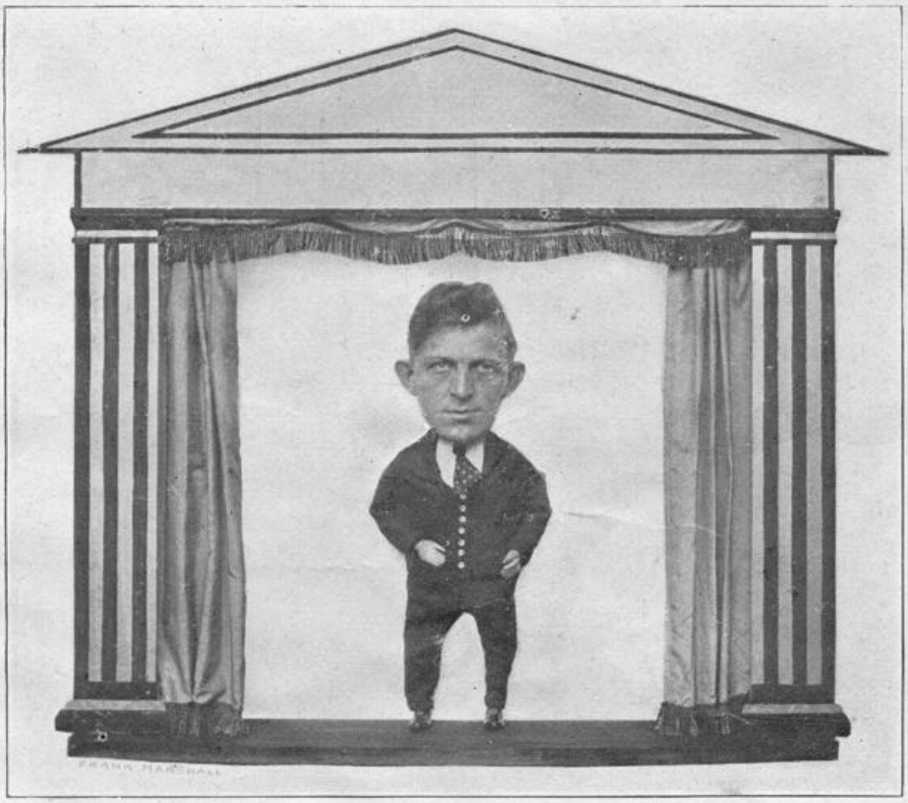
No. L73—LITHOGRAPH POSTERS. It pays to advertise. We offer one of the finest lithographed posters for the ventriloquist. Size 21 x 28 inches. Beautifully illustrated in colors with ventriloquist sitting at table with figure on his knee. Space on top of poster for your name and ad.

Chair and table covers in many varieties.

Monograms made to your special order.

Repair and Service Department

Our repair and service department is always at your service. If your ventriloquial, Punch and Judy, marionette or any other figure is in need of repairs or repaint forward them to us and we will serve you to your complete satisfaction. Prices are always reasonable. Work is guaranteed.



Living Marionette Shows

No LM74—This show consists of a very beautiful theatre or stage. Performer stands back of a curtain; only his head protrudes through a slot in the back curtain from which a miniature figure is suspended. His face is made up to represent the character he wishes to portray. The small figure is made so that the performer can move the arms and legs in the most life-like manner while he sings or talks or dances. The effect is most grotesque and causes roars of laughter. Several characters can be represented in rotation according to the number of figures used. Or two performers with different characters can put on a little skit. Complete show as illustrated, two characters, dialogue and instructions. Portable, very light and sets up in a few minutes. Packed in fiber carrying case.

Characters to select from: Boy, Girl, Scotchman, Negro, Old Lady, Old Man.

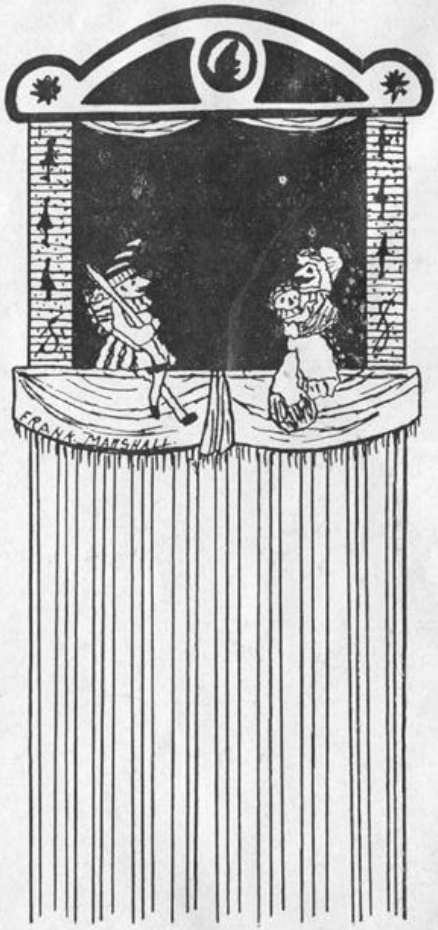
Illustrated are professional Punch and Judy figures. Height of head about six inches. Characters, reading from left to right:

No. P75—Hebrew. No. P76—Negro. No. P77—Irish. No. P78—Clown. No. P79—Doctor. No. P80—Punch. No. P81—Judy. No. P82—Punch Baby. No. P83—Devil. No. P84—Ghost. No. P85—Hangman. No. P86—Sheriff. No. 87—Alligator. Not illustrated: No. P88—Prize Fighters (set of two). No. P89—Undertaker.

Our Punch figures are natural looking and comical in appearance and create a good impression. The heads are carved of a solid block of light weight wood, painted in natural colors and costumed in fine materials. These figures are well made to give a lot of service and stand hard abuse.

Below is the Punch Cabinet. Constructed to meet the demands of the professional Punch manipulator. The skeleton is built portable of a light weight wood. Set up in a few minutes. Height about 90 inches. Curtains are of fine material and very attractive patterns.

All the World Loves a Punch and Judy Show



No. PO89—Outfit complete with 10 Punch characters costumed. Punch Cabinet and curtains, Silver Punch Reed, dialogue and packed in fiber carrying case.

No. PO90—Outfit complete with 7 Punch characters costumed. Punch Cabinet and curtains, Silver Punch Reed, dialogue and packed in fiber carrying case.

No. PO91—Outfit complete with 10 Punch characters costumed, Silver Punch Reed, dialogue.

No. PO92—Outfit complete with 7 Punch characters, Silver Punch Reed and dialogue.

No. PC93—Punch Cabinet and curtain complete.

No. PC94—Punch Cabinet skeleton only. (No curtain.)

Individual figures costumed. See list.

Individual figures not costumed. See list.

No. PD95—Punch and Judy dialogue with instructions and many tips.

THE MARSHALL PUNCH AND JUDY REED IS THE FINEST TONE QUALITY REED MADE.

No. R96—Genuine Sterling Silver Punch and Judy Reed.

No. R97—Gold Punch and Judy Reed in leather case.

Resale Punch and Judy Reeds can be supplied in any number, also envelopes.

Punch and Judy Outfit for Children

No. PO98—This outfit consists of seven Punch and Judy characters: Punch, Judy, Devil, Policeman, Doctor, Baby, Alligator. Punch Cabinet and curtain, Silver Punch Reed and dialogue. This outfit is very light in weight and can be set up on any ordinary table. It is constructed just like the professional set.

Ventriloquial Punch and Judy Figures

An exclusive Marshall Feature. Punch figures with a movable mouth. The mouth is so arranged that it is manipulated with ease yet does not interfere with the movement of the figures. Practical, fool-proof. The next time you order include several of these ventriloquial Punch figures. You will be surprised and your audience delighted.

M99 **M100** **M101** **M102** **M103** **M104**

Illustrated are several complete professional marionettes costumed, height about 18 inches. Heads, bodies, legs and hands are carved of wood. Construction is of the flexible type and any desired movement is possible.

Marionettes are a specialty with us catering to the profession for many years. We are in a position to take care of your marionette needs; it matters not if you are a professional or an amateur. The quality, workmanship and service are the best.

For your special requirements we build to your specification. Complete productions built, stages, props, scenery, etc.

The following marionettes are complete with head, body, arms and hands, legs, but not costumed. Heads and hands are painted in natural colors.

M99—M100—M101—M102—M103—M104
M105—M106—M107—M108—M109—M110—M111
M112—M113—M114—M115—M116—M117—M118
M119—M120—M121—M122—M123—M124
M125—M126—M127—M128

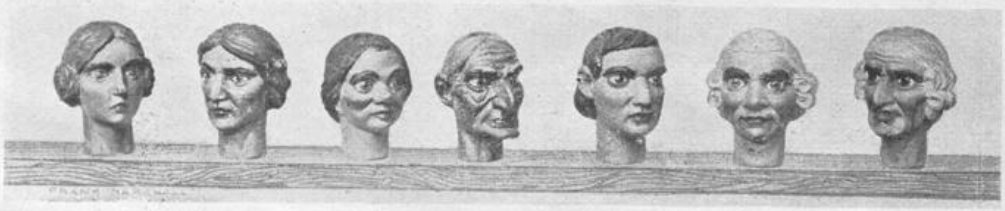
When ordering marionette heads give number of marionette and state head only.

No. MB129—Marionette bodies for 18-inch puppet complete without head.

No. MC132—Marionette control. Wood, airplane style.

No. MC133—Marionette control. Aluminum airplane style.

Costumes for Marionettes Made to Order



M105 M106 M107 M108 M109 M110 M111

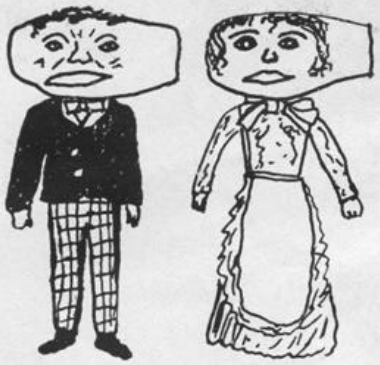
M112 M113 M114 M115 M116 M117 M118

M119 M120 M121 M122 M123 M124

M125 M126 M127 M128

Talking Hands

No. TH36—Talking Hands. Anyone who is a ventriloquist or mimic can have loads of fun with these funny, grotesque figures. Can be had in the following characters: Boy, Girl, Old Man, Old Lady, Irish and Negro.



Puppet Plays edited by Paul McPharlin. (Typewritten producing directions may be rented for each play.)

TO THE PURCHASER

Write name and catalogue number of articles desired.

Remit by Post Office or Express Money Order or Certified Check.

When sending currency be sure to register letter.

C. O. D. orders must be accompanied by a deposit of one-half of the order.

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Terms are cash with order at net catalogue prices.

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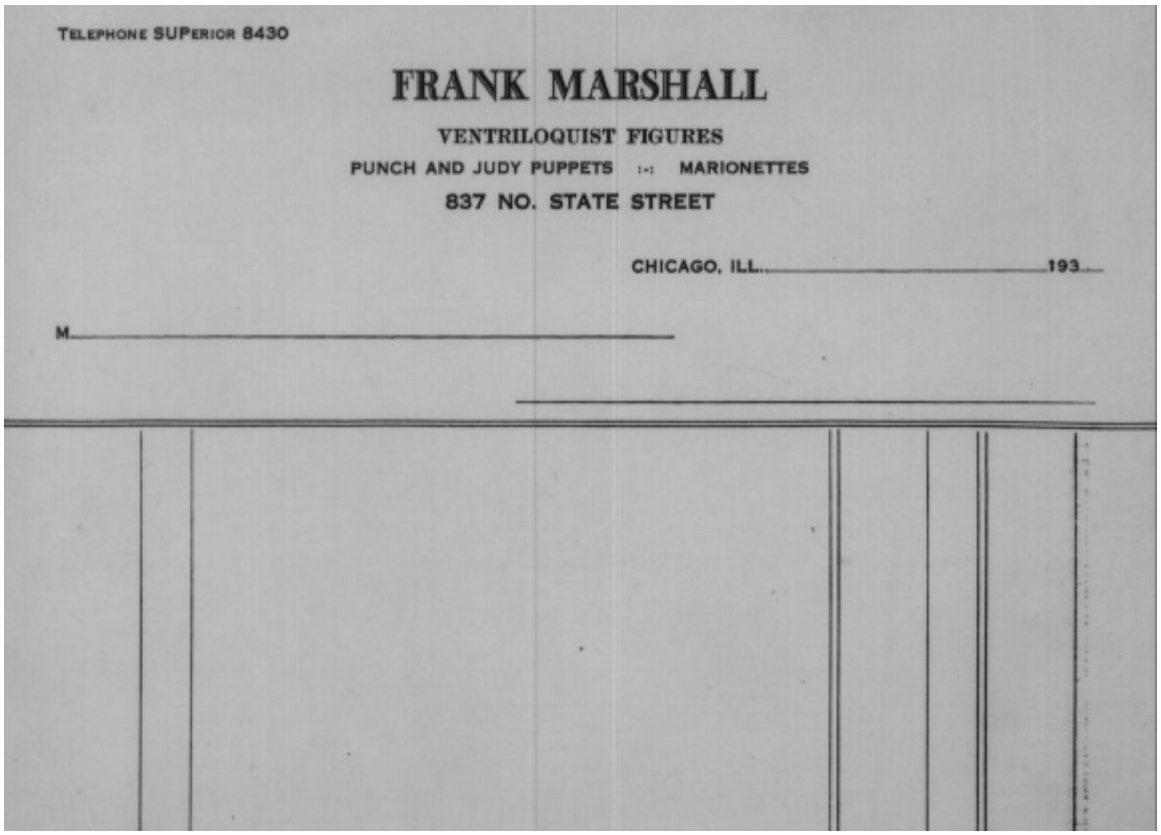

TELEPHONE SUPERIOR 8430

FRANK MARSHALL

VENTRILOQUIST FIGURES

PUNCH AND JUDY PUPPETS :-: MARIONETTES

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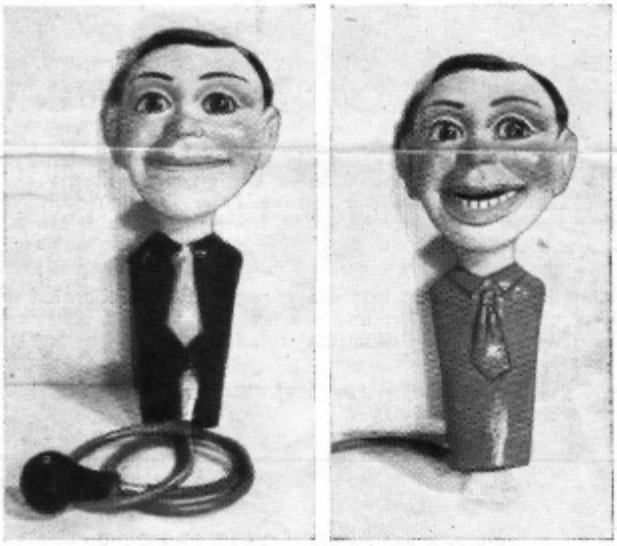
CATALOGUE OF

VENTRILOQUIST'S APPARATUS

and PUNCH & JUDY PUPPETS, etc., etc.

Vampire "MINI-VENT" DOLL

An Exclusive Novelty



The special features are the large sized real-glass eyes, and large mouth, which enable the movements to be seen at quite a long distance. The eyes are balanced, and move in right direction to the turn of the head.

The mouth is of the flexible-kid type, invisibly joined, and works by long distance pneumatic control.

You can have the Doll tucked in the left side of your jacket . . . and the lead will go round your back and into your right side trouser pocket. All you have to do is to squeeze the ball with your hand in your pocket, AND THE MOUTH WORKS !

DELIGHTFUL FOR CHILDREN. IDEAL FOR CLOSE-UP. TAKES A MINIMUM OF SPACE. ADDS ORIGINALITY TO YOUR ACT. EASY ON THE PURSE.

SIZE 9" OVERALL

PRICE **£4-10-0**

U.S.A. $14.00

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THE ART OF
L. J. INSULL

We think it only right and proper that, when a man has done so much to further the best interests of magician ventriloquists, he should receive some recognition of his services.

J. L. Insull has been making our Vent' Dolls for many years now and we have supplied them to Leading Entertainers throughout the world. He studied the art from his father, and also took up engineering and mechanics. In this direction he has a great flair and there is practically no type of working model of moving figure that he cannot undertake. His skill in design and construction is such that only once can we recall ever having had one of our heads back for repair.

The actual finish of all work is, of course, quite uncanny. Up to the time of writing, Great Britain leads the World in the production of this fine quality apparatus and the crude hand-carved wooden dolls used in the U.S.A. for so long, are like idols of savages compared with these.

If you have a mind for an Exclusive Design, he will model it for you, but this original model is, of course, quite expensive. However, you do have the satisfaction of knowing that no others will ever be made from your mould, although you can get further models if you wish.

In offering the New Items in this list, we have colloborated with Mr. Insull to produce something of Real Novelty, and we feel that here is a selection to be proud of, and one which will fulfil Ventriloquists' requirements for a long time to come.

We have the Exclusive Services of J. L. Insull. Let us know your special requirements and we will quote you.

TERMS OF BUSINESS

Address.—Write in Capitals, please.

Payment.—Cash with Order. International Money Orders from overseas. Dollars accepted.

C.O.D.—Only for amounts of £1 or over.

Alternative Selections are advisable in rush periods, to avoid disappointment.

Items Unobtainable.—Excess cash is held to your credit and a credit note returned.

Not outside Great Britain

All Heads made to order only - time Approx. 3 weeks

Vampire

VENTRILOQUIAL FIGURES

ARE THE WORLD'S BEST

We take great pride in announcing that we have just produced a New Range of Vent Heads and Bodies, to our own exclusive designs.

Nothing so fine has ever been seen before. The superb quality of finish, the wonderful lifelike yet cheeky expression, has brought comments of admiration from all who have seen them.

THE MOUTH MOVEMENT is of flexible kid leather, smoothly worked right into the composition so that detection is impossible. When the lips move, the mouth has all the flexibility of real skin.

BANISH ALL CRUDE WOODEN VENT. DOLLS WITH OLD FASHIONED CUT MOUTHS SHOWING A SLOT AT EACH SIDE OF THE JAW! BE MODERN IN YOUR OUTLOOK— AND MODERNISE YOUR SHOW WITH A SUPER-MODERN DOLL.

The very young children are really frightened of ugly Vent. Dolls, and many Ventriloquists would be surprised to know the real reason why they did not get the return date they expected.

The surface of the faces is not shiny, but matt finish like skin. These Dolls are made to last for years, as hundreds of users of our previous models will testify. Take our word for it as reputable dealers, we guarantee you will be more than satisfied if you buy through the post.

STANDARD MOVEMENTS. The two sizes of heads we list, both have standardized movements viz. Moving mouth and Balanced Eye Movement. This means the eyes point automatically in either direction as the head is turned. All other movements can be easily incorporated, and are built in to order (as below)

SMALL HEAD ..... PRICE £4-10-0
U.S.A. $15.00

LARGE HEAD ..... PRICE £6-10-0
U.S.A. $22.00

EXTRA MOVEMENTS. The two sizes of heads, Raising eyebrows, L. or R. Winking Eye, Crying, Smiling, Rising Hair Movement, Raising Arm, Smoking, Flapping Ears.

EACH MOVEMENT . PRICE £2-0-0
U.S.A. $7.00

Real Glass Eyes used in All Our Models.

Note: - If additional Eye Movements are required it is necessary to first incorporate Controlled eyes, and that counts as 1 movement

DRESSED FIGURES

For the first time we are offering in this Catalogue an additional service, that of Dressed Figures. There is no doubt that an outfit which has been specially made for a Doll fits and looks better than anything else. These suits are well made in good quality cloth, and look very attractive in a show.

SMALL FIGURE (Outfit Only) ... £3-0-0
SMALL FIGURE (Outfit only) U.S.A. $10
LARGE FIGURE (Outfit only) ... £5-0-0
LARGE FIGURE (Outfit only) U.S.A. $16.00

MOULDED BODIES

All Bodies are sold separately from the heads and are priced **undressed.** They have a beautifully moulded torso, with flexible cloth stuffed arms and legs. The **hands and feet are moulded,** with the feet actually moulded into black boots. The head is inserted through the open neck, and the controls worked through the hole in the back of the body.

SMALL BODY £4-10-0
SMALL BODY (U.S.A.) $14.00

All controls are brought down through the head by means of cords, and are so arranged that any number can be easily operated with one hand. They fasten onto small levers, and the fingers jump from one to the other as on a piano. It is a simple and foolproof arrangement that has fully stood the test of tme.

Regarding dressing, if you wish to do this yourself, an easy way is to go to a boys outfitters and let them find you a suit to fit.

The small figure is about half of the size of the large figure and that is of a child of about five years of age. For your guidance we give the following measurements.

SMALL FIGURE Head and Body
30" overall.

LARGE FIGURE. Head and Body
44" overall

One more tip. To find the price of a complete dressed figure, add price of head body and dress together, and then add the cost of any extra movements.

Famous "Vampire"
VENTRILOQUIAL GLOVE PUPPET

This innovation has been widely praised by the magicians and performers who have seen them, and we guarantee that if you buy one without seeing it, you will be more than satisfied.

The head is the size of two medium clasped hands, and the body is made in cloth of the conventional glove figure type, similar to Mr. Punch of the P. & J. outfit.

HANDS AND FEET ARE CARVED IN WOOD. ONE FINGER OPERATES THE FLEXIBLE MOUTH MOVEMENT. EYES ARE REAL GLASS AND BALANCED TO MOVE AUTOMATICALLY.

YOU CAN SIT THE FIGURE ON THE LEFT FOREARM AND LET THE LEGS DANGLE.

If you want to cut down the weight of your show you cannot do better than get one of these Superb Figures, for they can be rolled up for packing.

The dress beautifully made with good quality cloth.

PRICE **£7-10-0**

U.S.A. $23.00

Vampire **TALKING SKULL**

Here is a grand new innovation for your Vent. Act that will make you the talk of the town.

Those of you who are on the lookout for Novelty, will quickly appreciate that here is an item that could be a gold mine in the hands of a competent performer.

The skull is full adult size, and so realistic that we know you will only be convinced if we show you a photograph.

THERE IS ONLY ONE MOVEMENT— THE JAW. It is very easy to work with one finger only.

It could be introduced as though the Skull has come into your possession in a peculiar way, and suddenly, whilst you are talking, THE SKULL SPEAKS ! !

WEIRD ! EFFECTIVE !
LUDICROUS !

Another idea that has just occurred to us whilst writing, would be to insert the handle into a box, so that you could hold this in the left hand and the right hand would not be seen, as it could enter through the open back.

PRICE ..... ~~£4~~ £3

U.S.A. $14.00 $10.00

Vampire TALKING
TOBY JUG

A NEW EXCLUSIVE MODEL

To look at this at only three feet away, you would have difficulty in telling it from real china. Only the fact that it is feather-weight when lifted gives it away. Two controls for Moving Flexible Mouth and Moving Eyes. Works one-handed. Exquisitely Painted and Finished. Good for Comedy. SIZE 9 inches high.

PRICE **£9-0-0**

PRICE (U.S.A.) **$30.00**

Vampire
TALKING CAT

A NEW EXCLUSIVE MODEL

This is as large as a very large Tom Cat. It is a real beauty, and the head turns as easily as any vent. doll. Moving Eyes and Moving Flexible Mouth, controlled on a rod and worked through the hole in back. Has limitless possibilities for comedy. Finished in Fur Flock, exactly as photograph. SIZE 17 inches high.

PRICE **£11-0-0**

PRICE (U.S.A.) $36.00

THE COLONEL

A "VAMPIRE" EXCLUSIVE

This is the smallest head we make, and it is fitted to the top of a Walking Stick. One movement only possible—MOVING MOUTH. Usual high quality finish. Stick breaks in half for packing. Ideal for packing. Ideal for microphone work. Single finger control on tiny lever. A splendid novelty. SIZE 4 inches head.

PRICE **£3-10-0**

PRICE (U.S.A.) **$11.00**

Vampire **PUNCH & JUDY FIGURES**

These figures are not made by Mr. Insull, but are hand carved in wood to withstand the constant knocking about. They are generally acknowledged to be the best in the business in Great Britain. Mr. Punch's head is 9" long (without hat) and the other dolls are 12" high altogether.

The Set comprises:—

Punch	Hangman
Judy	Baby
Doctor	Ghost
Clown	Crocodile
Policeman	Stick
Beadle	Gallows

Real Professional Pattern. Hand Carved Wood Heads, Hands and Feet.

Dressed in traditional Costumes, with brightly coloured felt, art silk ribbon and braid.

A joy to behold—A joy to work with.

We could give you a long list of well-known Punch & Judy artistes who use and praise these first-class figures. Sold on a guarantee of satisfaction.

SINGLE FIGURES MADE TO ORDER ONLY.

This photo shows the Policeman and the Beadle.

The Crocodile looks rather large as it is in the foreground of the picture.

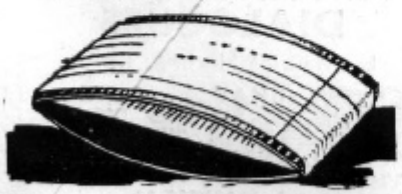
The heads are about the size of a man's two small hands clasped together.

Mr. Punch is rather larger, of course.

COMPLETE SET ..... **PRICE £18**

COMPLETE SET (U.S.A.) .:. **$60.00**

PUNCH CALL



These little gadgets are used for making the "funny voice" of Punch in the famous Punch and Judy show.

PRICE **2/6**

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Vampire LIGHTWEIGHT FOLDING
PUNCH & JUDY FRAME

Anyone who has ever worked Punch knows that at least half as hard as doing the show, is the work of erecting and taking down the frame itself. The ungainly proportions, the bulk, and the time wasted are some of the factors which have kept many first-class entertainers from taking up this fascinating and most remunerative of all branches of children's entertaining. A man who is successful often has to visit two or three houses or shows on one afternoon in the busy season, and cannot afford to waste so much time as is required to handle the average Punch Set-Up.

We have no hesitation in saying that this frame REVOLUTIONISES the business. Never before has a single invention so influenced the livelihood of Punch workers. The principles involved to make this frame collapse are so ingenious that when it is folded up you begin to wonder where it has all gone to. Read these salient features:—

1. Weight approx. 16lbs.
2. Time to erect the frame (without cloth) is 45 seconds.
3. Perfect rigidity of joints.
4. No screws, nuts or bolts.
5. Adjustable Playboard.
6. Folds into two complete sections. Size overall folded is 3ft. 6ins. x 10ft. x 10ft.
7. Strongly made and well finished in white hardwood.
8. Provision for top covering.
9. Also suitable for Glove Puppet Theatre.
10. Open size is 7 feet high by 3 feet square.

We could quote a list of dozens of satisfied users, but words of one will suffice. Professor Stafford said: " I have never seen anything to equal it for speed of erection and rigidity of construction.

Professor Bofeys also had one made to order.

What we offer is a clear set of scale drawings with detailed descriptions and diagrams to enable you to make up this whole outfit yourself without any special skill. ... ... PRICE 5/-

We are prepared to make you a P. & J. Frame as above complete (without surround cloth). Time about two or three weeks. Cash with order. A model is on view in our Magical Showroom for you to examine. ... ... PRICE £13-10-0

VENTRILOQUIAL MANUSCRIPTS

THE REAL SECRET OF VENTRILOQUISM

This is a masterly but simple course which will enable anyone—man, woman or child—to take up this fascinating art. IT IS ACTUALLY A VOICE ILLUSION. You are taken right through the course and, at the finish, you get a very funny Ventriloquial Dialogue that you can use at home or parties.

PRICE **2/6**

VENTRILOQUIAL DIALOGUES

by Maurice Hurling, I.B.V.

1. **CHEEKY CHAT** 5/-
2. **BURLESQUE SECOND SIGHT** 5/-
3. **VENTRILOQUIAL TITBITS** ... 5/-
4. **SCHOOL CHEEK** 5/-
5. **THE MAGICIAN** 5/-
6. **NAUGHTY NAUTICAL NAUTIONS** 5/-

Central Printing Co. (Chas. Sowden) Ltd., Burnley, Lancs.

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United States Patent [19]

Kosicki et al.

[11] **3,900,991**

[45] **Aug. 26, 1975**

[54] **VENTRILOQUIST DOLL**

[75] Inventors: **Witold W. Kosicki**, Columbia; **Charles M. Hollingsworth**, West Columbia, both of S.C.

[73] Assignee: **Horsman Dolls Inc.**, Columbia, S.C.

[22] Filed: **Nov. 9, 1973**

[21] Appl. No.: **414,210**

[52] **U.S. Cl.** **46/116**; 46/126

[51] **Int. Cl.** **A63h 13/00**

[58] **Field of Search** 46/116, 119, 120, 126, 46/135, 154

[56] **References Cited**

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Primary Examiner—Louis G. Mancene
Assistant Examiner—Robert F. Cutting
Attorney, Agent, or Firm—Shenier & O'Connor

[57] **ABSTRACT**

A ventriloquist doll in which a neck socket on the torso receives a generally hemispherical head support carrying a hollow head provided with a movable member such as a jaw resiliently biased to one position and adapted to be moved to another position by a lever pivotally carried by the support and having a trigger portion associated with a handle extending downwardly from the head support into the torso and accessible through an opening in the back of the torso and in which a resilient element connected between the handle and the torso holds the assembly of the head and its support in position while permitting both turning and inclination of the head relative to the torso by manipulation of the handle and operation of the jaw by actuation of the lever trigger portion.

16 Claims, 5 Drawing Figures

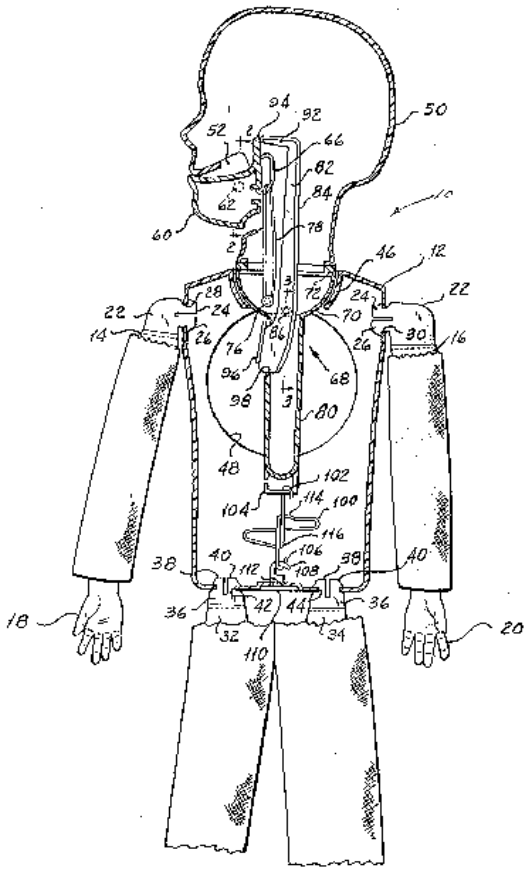

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Fig 1

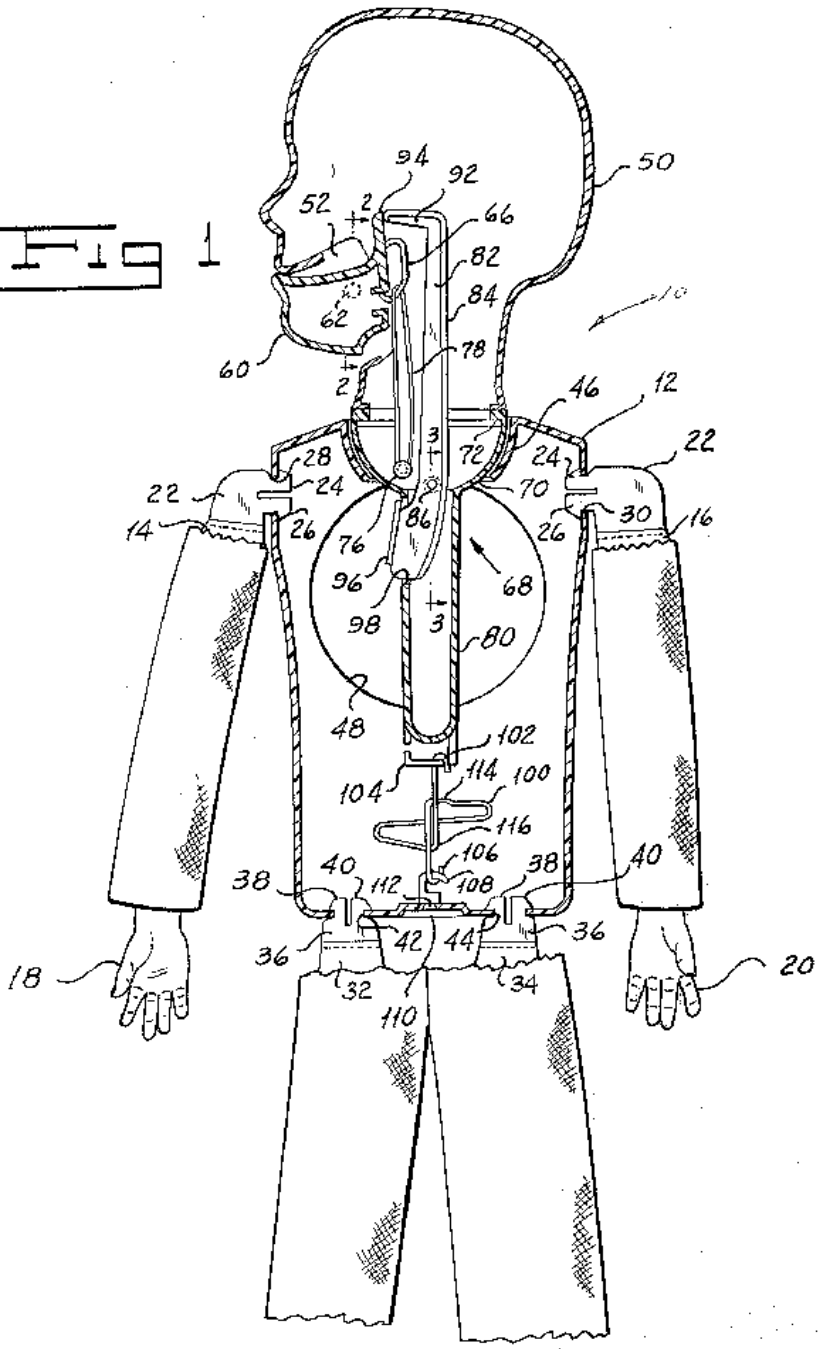

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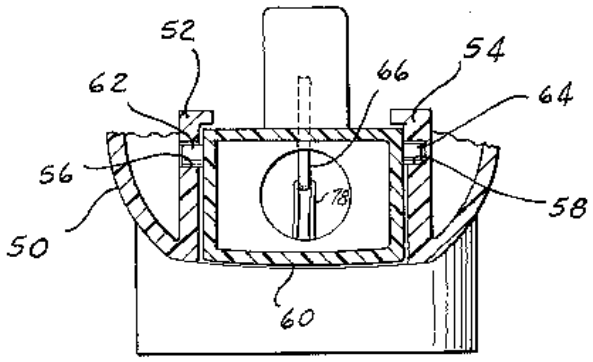
Fig 2



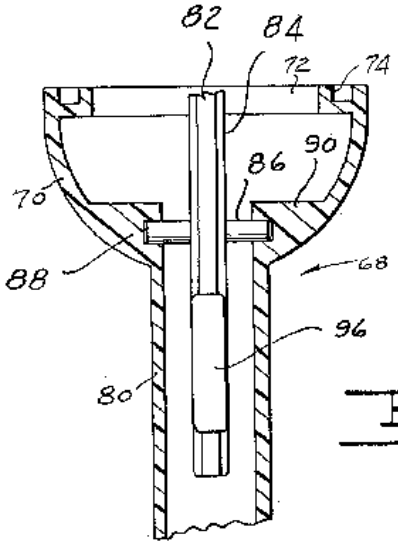


Fig 3

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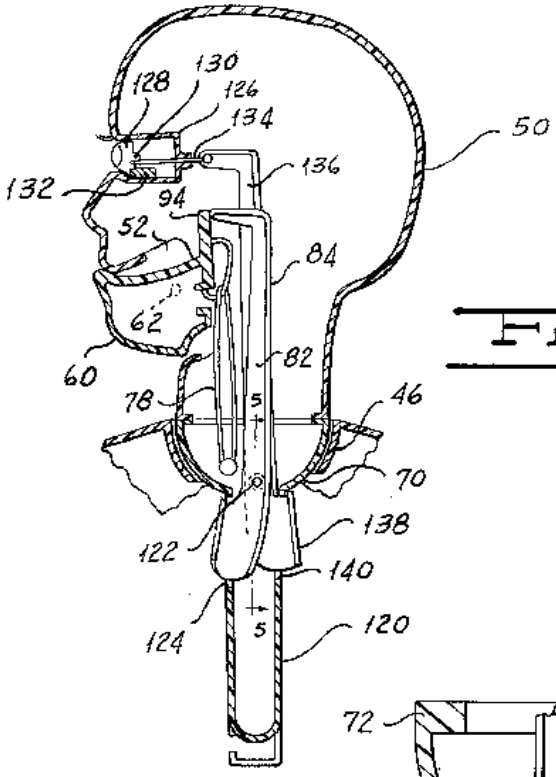

Fig 4

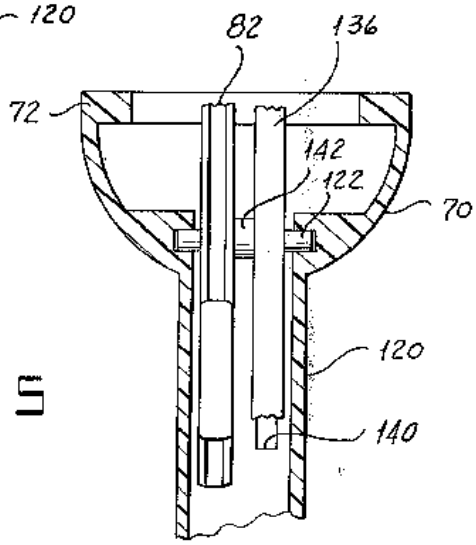

Fig 5

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VENTRILOQUIST DOLL

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

There are known in the prior art ventriloquist dolls having jaws which are movable by manual actuation of an element such as a draw-string or the like accessible to the operator. While these ventriloquist dolls of the prior art will operate to simulate opening and closing of the doll's mouth, they are relatively unsophisticated and are somewhat difficult to operate. They do not permit of relatively realistic movements of the head with relation to the torso. In addition, the heads generally are permitted to flop loosely when the doll is not in use so that they do not make an attractive display at a location, for example, at which the dolls are sold.

We have invented a ventriloquist doll which is an improvement over ventriloquist dolls of the prior art. Our doll is relatively easy to operate. It provides a desirable trigger operation. Our doll permits of both turning movement and inclination of the doll's head relative to its body in response to operation of a handle. Our ventriloquist doll holds its head erect on the torso when not in use. It is relatively simple in construction for the result achieved thereby.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

One object of our invention is to provide a ventriloquist doll which is relatively easy to operate.

Another object of our invention is to provide a ventriloquist doll which can be actuated in response to a trigger.

A further object of our invention is to provide a ventriloquist doll which permits both turning and tilting of the doll's head in response to manipulation of a handle.

Still another object of our invention is to provide a ventriloquist doll the head of which is held erect when the doll is not in use.

Other and further objects of our invention will appear from the following description.

In general our invention contemplates the provision of a ventriloquist doll in which the head is supported by a hemispherical member positioned in a neck socket on the doll's torso and in which a movable member such as the doll's jaw is biased to one position and is adapted to be moved to another position in response to actuation of a lever pivotally supported on the hemispherical member and having a trigger portion associated with a handle extending downwardly from the head support into the torso and accessible through an opening in the back of the torso to permit both turning and tilting movement of the head in response to manipulation of the handle as well as movement of the jaw in response to operation of the trigger portion.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In the accompanying drawings which form part of the instant specification and which are to be read in conjunction therewith and in which like reference numerals are used to indicate like parts in the various view:

FIG. 1 is a sectional view of our ventriloquist doll with its head turned to one side.

FIG. 2 is a fragmentary sectional view of the doll shown in FIG. 1 taken along the line 2—2 of FIG. 1 and drawn on an enlarged scale.

FIG. 3 is a fragmentary sectional view of our ventriloquist doll taken along the line 3—3 of FIG. 1 and drawn on an enlarged scale.

FIG. 4 is a fragmentary sectional view of an alternate embodiment of our ventriloquist doll.

FIG. 5 is a fragmentary sectional view of our ventriloquist doll taken along the line 5—5 of FIG. 4 and drawn on an enlarged scale.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring now to the drawings, our ventriloquist doll, indicated generally by the reference character 10, includes a torso 12 formed of any suitable relatively rigid synthetic resin. A pair of arms 14 and 16 which may, for example, be made from tubes of fabric filled with a suitable stuffing carry hands 18 and 20 made from a relatively softer synthetic resin than that of which the torso is formed. Each arm is attached to the torso 12 by a connector 22 formed of synthetic sheet material and provided with barbed bifurcations 24 and 26. Each connector 22 is secured to the associated arm 14 or 16 by any suitable means such, for example, as by stitching. The connector associated with arm 14 is inserted into a slot 28 at one side of the body while the connector 22 associated with the other arm 16 is inserted in a slot 30 in the other side of the torso 12.

Each of the legs 32 and 34, which may be made from stuffed fabric, is secured to a connector 36 by means such as stitching. Each connector 36 is formed of synthetic resin sheet material and is provided with barbed bifurcations 38 and 40. The connector 36 of leg 32 is inserted into a slot 42 in the bottom of the torso while the connector 36 associated with leg 34 is inserted into a slot 44 in the bottom of the torso.

We form the upper end of the torso 12 with a neck socket 46 of generally spherical configuration. An opening 48 in the back of the torso affords access to the interior of the torso for a reason to be described hereinbelow.

Our doll includes a head 50 having a jaw opening provided with a pair of inwardly directed sides 52 and 54 formed with pivot pin-receiving sockets 56 and 58. The jaw 60 of our doll is formed with a pair of pivot pins 62 and 64 adapted to be received in sockets 56 and 58 to permit the jaw to move between an open position and a closed position. The head and jaw may be made from any suitable synthetic resin. Preferably the walls 52 and 54 have sufficient resilience to permit the jaw to be snapped into place. A wire retainer 66 is secured to the back of the jaw for a reason to be described hereinbelow.

We provide our ventriloquist doll with a head support and handle forming member indicated generally by the reference character 68. Operator 68 is formed with an upper hemispherical portion 70 adapted to be received in the socket 46. An inwardly directed flange 72 at the top of the support 70 receives the neck portion of head 50 which may be secured to the flange by any suitable cement. A pin 76 within support 70 receives one end of a rubber band or the like 78, the other end of which is received by the wire retainer 66. The rubber band 78 normally urges the jaw 60 to a closed position.

We form the operator 68 with a generally cylindrical handle 80 extending downwardly from the support 70 into the torso and accessible through the opening 48. The operating assembly 68 includes an actuator lever 82 formed with a reinforcing flange 84 and pivotally supported on a pivot pin 86 which rides in bosses 88 and 90 formed in the inside of the support 70. One end

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92 of the lever 82 is bent so as to engage an extension 94 on the rear wall of the jaw 60. The other end of the handle 82 extends outwardly through a trigger opening 98 in the handle 80 and is provided with a trigger plate 96.

From the structure just described, it will be seen that the rubber band 78 urges the jaw 60 to a closed position. At the same time, extension 94 engages the end 92 of lever 82 to move the lever to a position at which flange 84 engages the inner surface of handle 80 and the trigger plate 96 protrudes from the slot 98. When the trigger plate is operated lever 82 pivots to cause end 92 to engage extension 94 to pivot jaw 60 against the action of band 78 to an open position.

We provide our assembly with a safety spring 100 which holds the assembly of the head 50 and operator 68 in position with the head erect while preventing accidental removal of the assembly from the torso. A hook 102 at one end of the spring 100 engages a hook 104 formed at the lower end of the handle 80. A hook 106 on the other end of spring 100 engages a hook 108 carried by a plug 110. We so construct the plug 110 and hook 108 as to permit the hook to be snapped into an opening 112 in the bottom of the torso. While thus being retained in position on the torso, the plug is relatively free to rotate to prevent damage to the parts upon repeated turning of the head 50.

Spring 100 is so constructed as normally to tend to move hooks 102 and 106 closer together. If an attempt is made to pull the head off the torso, ultimately inter-engageable portions 114 and 116 of the spring engage to prevent complete removal of the head.

In use of our ventriloquist doll, the operator inserts his hand through opening 48 and grasps the handle 80. When this is done, trigger 96 is easily actuated by the forefinger, for example, to move the jaw 60 between its open and closed positions. At the same time, the handle can be twisted to cause the head to turn. Moreover, the handle can be pushed or pulled to turn support 70 in socket 46 to incline the doll's head. Moreover, when the doll is not in use, spring 100 holds the head 50 erect. No damage to the parts will occur upon repeated turnings of the head 50 since the plug 110 is free to rotate.

While we have shown in FIGS. 1 to 3 a form of our ventriloquist doll in which the lever 82 is adapted to actuate the doll's jaw, it will readily be understood that it might be arranged to actuate another movable element such as the eyes or the eyebrows. Moreover, more than one lever may be provided to operate more than one movable element.

Referring now to FIGS. 4 and 5, in an alternate embodiment of our ventriloquist doll the head support member 70 is provided with a handle 120 carrying a shaft 122 which supports lever 82 in a manner similar to that of the shaft 86 in FIG. 1. Handle 120 is provided with an opening or slot 124 through which the trigger end of handle 82 extends.

The head 50 of the form of our doll illustrated in FIGS. 4 and 5 is provided with an eye socket 126 which receives an eye 128 visible through an opening in the head 50. Pivots 130, one of which is shown in FIG. 4 support the eye 128 for pivotal movement between an open position and a closed position. A weight 132 on the eye 128 normally urges the eye 128 to open position. A rod 134 is supported on socket 126 for sliding movement is pivotally connected to eye 128 at a location in front of and below the axis of pivots 160 so that, when the rod is pulled to the right as viewed in FIG. 4 the eye 128 is pivoted to closed position.

The form of our doll shown in FIGS. 4 and 5 includes a second lever 136 pivotally supported on shaft 122. The lower or trigger end of lever 136 extends outwardly through a slot 140 in the rear portion of the handle 120. We pivotally connect the upper end of lever 136 to rod 134 in such a way that, when trigger 138 is pushed to pivot the lever rod 134 is pulled to move eye 128 to the closed position. When the trigger 138 is released weight 132 restores the lever to its initial position. If necessary or desirable we provide a return spring to assist weight 132 in restoring the parts to the eye open position.

It will be seen that the form of our doll shown in FIGS. 4 and 5 simulates both talking and winking. We might provide a similar arrangement to operate both eyes together, to operate the eyes individually or to raise the eyebrows. It will readily be appreciated that each of the jaw 60 and the eye 128 is an element which is visible to the observer and which is movable between two positions to simulate a five action. That is, movement of the jaw 60 between two positions simulates talking to the observer, while movement of the eye 128 between its two positions simulates opening and closing of the eye.

It will be seen that we have accomplished the objects of our invention. We have provided a ventriloquist doll which is relatively easy to operate. It permits of both turning movement and inclination of the doll's head in response to manipulation of a handle. It is so constructed that repeated turnings of the doll's head will not damage the parts. Our doll is so constructed that its head is held erect when the doll is not in use.

It will be understood that certain features and subcombinations are of utility and may be employed without reference to other features and subcombinations. This is contemplated by and is within the scope of our claims. It is further obvious that various changes may be made in details within the scope of our claims without departing from the spirit of our invention. It is, therefore, to be understood that our invention is not to be limited to the specific details shown and described.

Having thus described our invention, what we claim is:

1. A doll assembly including in combination a torso having a vertical axis, means forming a generally hemispherical socket at the upper end of said torso, said socket opening outwardly and having an opening in the bottom thereof, a head, a generally hemispherical head support carried by said head and adapted to be received in said socket over said opening, a handle extending downwardly into said body from the portion of said head support over said opening, the relative dimensions of said handle and said opening being such as to permit limited tilting movement of said head with respect to said axis as well as rotary movement of said head around said axis, and resilient means connected between said handle and said torso for urging said head to an erect position with reference to said axis, said torso formed with an opening permitting access to said handle for manipulation of said head.

2. A doll assembly as in claim 1 including means for limiting the extension of said resilient member.

3. A doll assembly as in claim 1 in which said resilient means is a spring and in which said extension limiting

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means comprises interengageable parts of said spring, said spring tension urging said parts into engagement.

4. A doll assembly as in claim 1 including a visible element, means mounting said element on said head for movement between a first position and a second position to simulate a live action, means for biasing said element to one of said positions, a manually operable member adapted to be actuated to move said element to the other of said positions, and means mounting said member on said head support for movement therewith.

5. A doll assembly as in claim 4 in which said manually operable member is a lever, one end of said lever extending downwardly into said torso, said torso opening permitting access to said one end of said lever.

6. A doll assembly as in claim 5 said handle receives the lower end of said lever, said lower end formed with a trigger portion normally protruding from said handle under the influence of said element biasing means.

7. A doll assembly as in claim 6 in which said element is a jaw mounted for pivotal movement on said head, said jaw and the other end of said lever comprising interengageable elements urged into engagement by said element biasing means.

8. A doll assembly as in claim 6 in which said element is an eye mounted for pivotal movement on said head, said manually operable means including means connecting the other end of said lever to said eye.

9. A doll assembly including in combination, a hollow torso, a hollow head, means including a socket on said torso and a head support carrying said head and disposed in said socket for mounting said head on said torso for rotary movement and for limited tilting movement, a handle extending into said torso from said head support, resilient means connected between said handle and said torso for biasing said head to an erect position, said torso being formed with an opening permitting access to said handle for manipulation of said head, a visible element, means mounting said visible element on said head for movement between a first position and a second position to simulate a live action, means for biasing said element to one of said positions, a lever formed with trigger portion at one end thereof, means mounting said lever for limited pivotal movement on said support with said one end disposed in said handle, and means including said element and the other end of said lever for causing said trigger portion normally to protrude from said support under the action of said element biasing means.

10. A doll assembly as in claim 9 in which said head biasing means comprises a tension spring and means for limiting the extension of said spring.

11. A doll assembly as in claim 9 in which said head biasing means connecting means comprises a plug rotatably supported in said torso.

12. A doll assembly as in claim 9 in which said visible element is a jaw mounted for pivotal movement on said head and in which said interengageable means comprise portions of said jaw and the other end of said lever.

13. A doll assembly as in claim 9 in which said socket and said head support are generally hemispherical.

14. A doll assembly including in combination, a torso, a head, means mounting said head on said torso, a first visible element, means mounting said first element on said head between a first position and a second position to simulate a first live action, means for biasing said first element to one of said positions, means including a first lever formed with a trigger portion adapted to be actuated to move said first element to its other position, a second visible element, means mounting said second element on said head for movement between a first position and a second position to simulate another live action, means for biasing said second element to one of its positions, and means including a second lever formed with a trigger portion adapted to be actuated to move said second element to its other position.

15. A doll assembly as in claim 14 in which said first visible element is a jaw and in which said second visible element is an eye.

16. A doll assembly including in combination, a torso, a head, means mounting said head on said torso, a visible element, means mounting said element on said head for movement between a first position and a second position to simulate a live action, a lever formed with a trigger portion, means mounting said lever on said head mounting means for movement between limit positions, one end of said lever and a portion of said element adapted to move into and out of engagement, and means for biasing said element to its first position to move said element portion and said lever end into engagement and to move said lever to one of its limit positions, said torso being provided with an opening for access to said lever trigger portion to permit said trigger to be actuated to move said lever to its other limit position to move said element to its second position against the action of said biasing means.

* * * * *

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United States Patent [19]

Hucks

[11] **Patent Number: 4,971,313**

[45] **Date of Patent: Nov. 20, 1990**

[54] **VENTRILOQUIST APPARATUS**

[76] Inventor: **Deborah A. Hucks**, 1021 Highway 544, Coastal Village, #21, Conway, S.C. 29526

[21] Appl. No.: **514,673**

[22] Filed: **Apr. 25, 1990**

[51] **Int. Cl.**[5] **A63J 5/00**; A63J 19/00

[52] **U.S. Cl.** **272/21**; 272/9

[58] **Field of Search** 446/82, 83, 84; 272/42, 272/46, 21, 11, 25, 9, 14; 358/185; 52/31, 29

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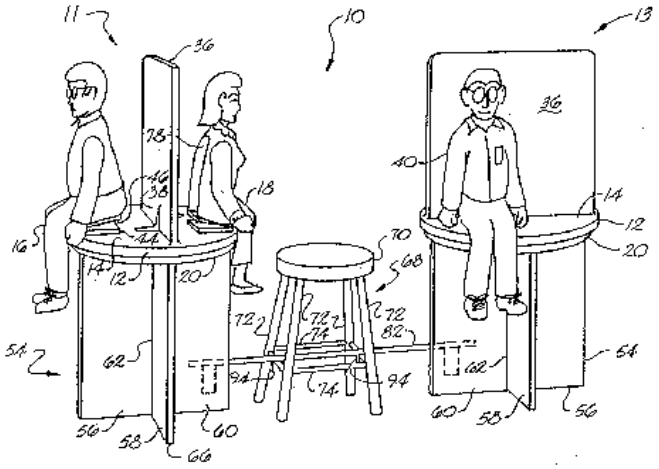
Primary Examiner—Richard J. Johnson
Attorney, Agent, or Firm—Dority & Manning

[57] **ABSTRACT**

A ventriloquist apparatus includes one or two ventriloquist devices. Each ventriloquist device includes a rotatable platform divided by a backboard into a first half and a second half. The first half has a first quadrant and a second quadrant, and the second half has a third quadrant and a fourth quadrant. The order of the quadrants is arranged consecutively in a circular fashion. A first ventriloquist doll is detachably mounted on an inclined member which is connected by a vertex to a base member attached to the rotatable platform in the first quadrant thereof and inclined toward the perimeter of the rotatable platform. Similarly, a second ventriloquist doll is detachably mounted to an inclined member which is connected by a vertex to a base member attached to the rotatable platform in the third quadrant thereof and inclined toward the perimeter of the rotatable platform. The rotatable platform is rotatably connected by a rotatable bearing to a support platform having a diameter smaller than the diameter of the rotatable platform. A pedestal carries the support platform above the stage floor. A seat for supporting the ventriloquist is maintained at a predetermined distance from the pedestal by a spacer bar detachably connected to one end to the pedestal and at an intermediate portion to a cross-brace which supports the seat.

18 Claims, 2 Drawing Sheets



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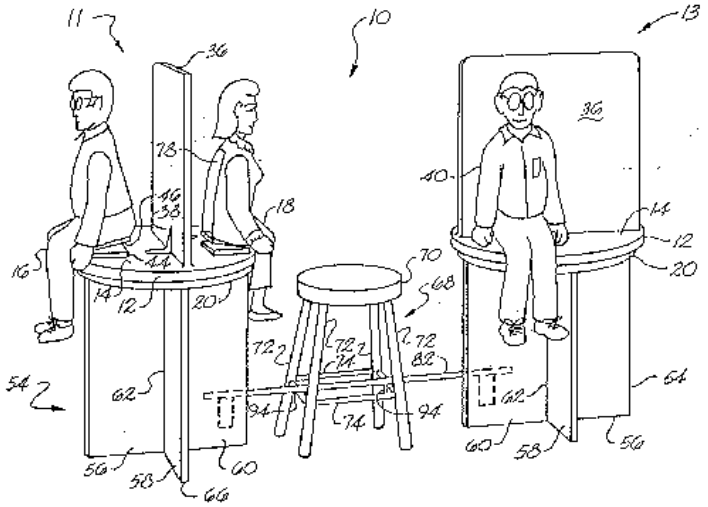

Fig. 1

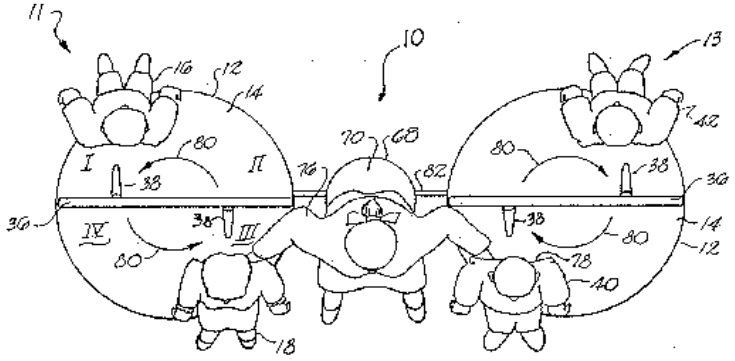

Fig. 2

More Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy Memorabilia

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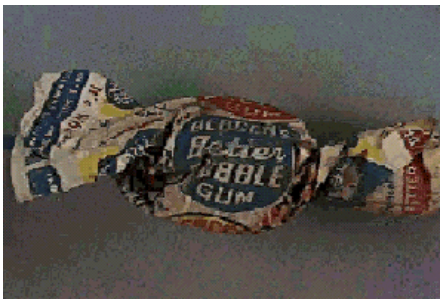
Closeup of souvenir silverware.
Knife courtesy of Todd Stockman



"Bergen's Better Bubble Gum"

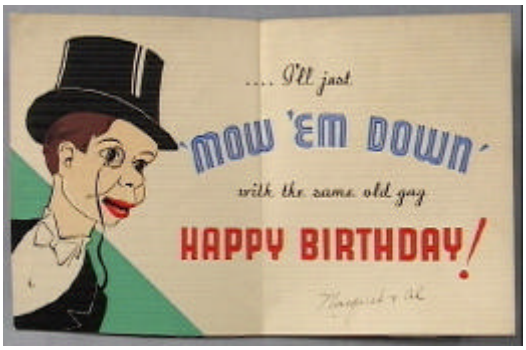
A plastic lapel pin.

The Mortimer Snerd "Jim Beam" brand liquor bottle. Note the depressed back.

Souvenir silverware.
Knife courtesy of Todd Stockman

Return

"Charlie... can you think of a good BIRTHDAY wish?"
OH DEFINITELY, MR. BERGEN....


.... I'll just
MOW 'EM DOWN
with the same old gag
HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

Edgar BERGEN · Charlie McCARTHY · MORTIMER SNERD
CHARLIE McCARTHY, DETECTIVE

CHARLIE McCARTHY DETECTIVE
ROBERT CUMMINGS

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"LOOK WHO'S LAUGHING"
ALLAN DWAN

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Edgar BERGEN and Charlie McCARTHY
Lucille BALL
'LOOK WHO'S LAUGHING'
ALLAN DWAN

EDGAR BERGEN AND CHARLIE McCARTHY
FIBBER McGEE AND MOLLY
LUCILLE BALL
LOOK WHO'S LAUGHING
ALLAN DWAN

Windup “walking” or “dancing” Charlie
with moving mouth. The tipping or rocking action
shifts the weight, causing it to “walk” or move
forward in a wide circle as the mouth opens and
closes, until the spring winds down.

Animated bank with moving mouth.
[Here it is activated by a string.]
Putting a coin in the top of the hat moves the mouth.
Note: no batteries, not a windup toy.
It is rotated for this CD-ROM to show it in profile.

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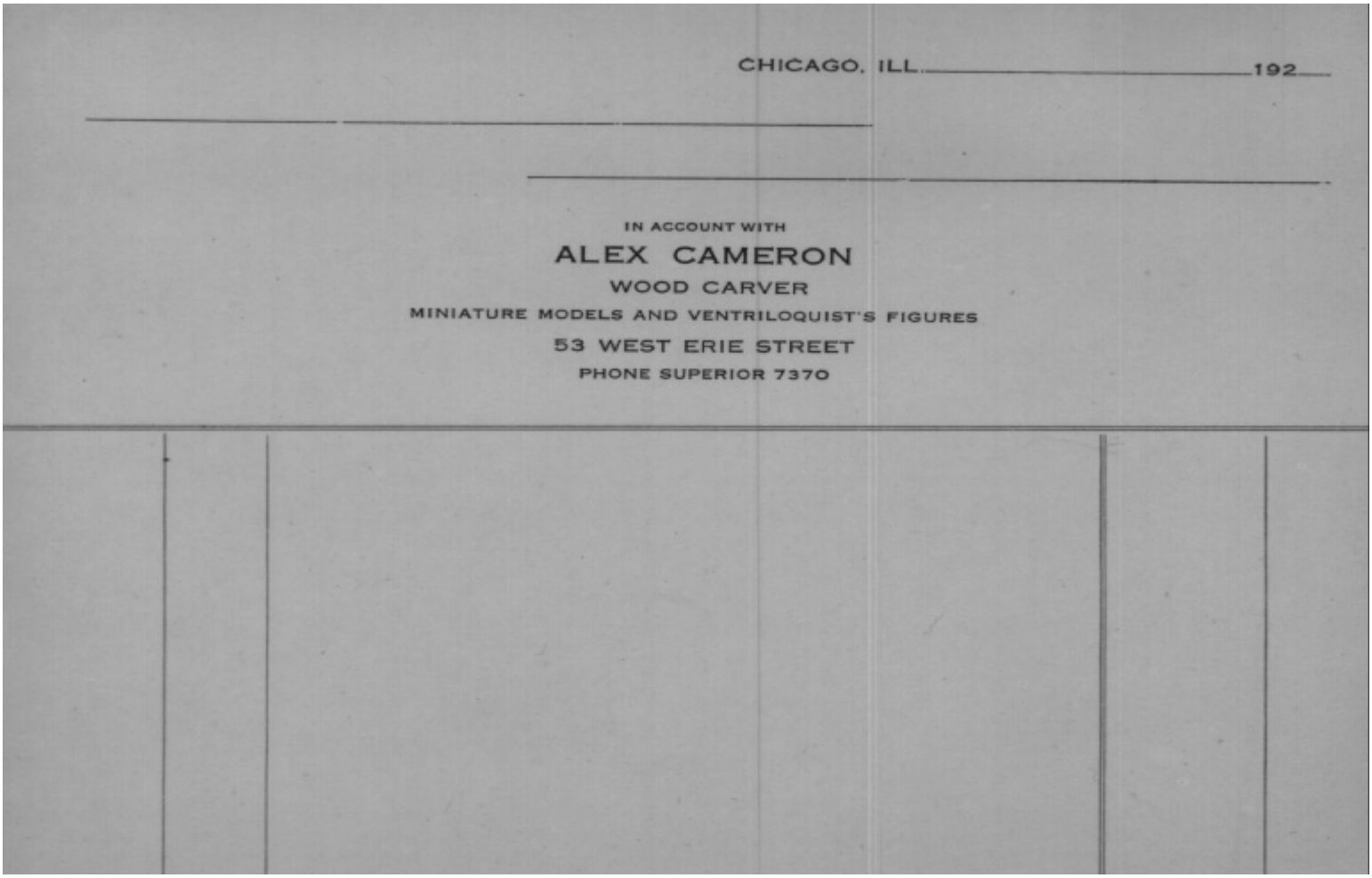

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MINIATURE MODELS AND VENTRILOQUIST'S FIGURES

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